A Rather Dramatic Displacement
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A Rather Dramatic Displacement

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Summary

Arceus grants the wish of the two heroes displaced in time

However, perhaps they should have consulted Dialga with the time portion of this

10 years isn't *too* far off for humans, right?

the scowling 5 year old didn't think so.

Notes

ohhhhh THIS is self indulgent as hell. My favorite tropes all mixed together

I am unashamed. Please enjoy

Chapter 1

Ingo knew that something was wrong the *moment* he opened his eyes. His blurry vision cleared near instantly with a few blinks, and the mess of colors next to him clued him to the wrongness quite abruptly.

Mostly because the first thing that he saw was *not* a familiar teenager sprawled out on the ground next to him - what he was expecting to be there - but a seemingly unfamiliar *child* sprawled out on the ground next to him.

A *small* child, on top of that. Most certainly not in the double digits. He doubted the girl was any older than 6 or 7… Maybe. He was never good at guessing children's ages, so he might be wrong; but they were certainly way too small to be the teenager he had just been standing side-by-side with before the god of all Pokemon.

As awareness started hitting him in stages,he also realized that he felt … different. Not in a bad way, just… *weird* , and not just in his head

He sat up fully, and placed a hand on his chest, feeling the Pearl Clan insignia stitched into the clothes, and the edge of his braid. He looked down at his hand, and it didn't *seem* different - still littered with small scars and that one big one that went from his thumb to his wrist (an incident with Lady Sneasler's eldest kit).

If he was still dressed as he was before, and still had all of his scars, why did he feel so odd?

The child next to him started to stir, letting out a groan as they sat up and rubbing at her face with a small hand clenched in a fist, the kid grumbling as they started to become aware of their surroundings.

He turned his head to look back out at the forest around them, his memories coming back to him in bits and pieces. He was starting to remember where they were, and what he had been doing. Who he had been with.They were headed home. And he had been with -

Akari, he was supposed to be with *Akari* . And Akari was a teenager - quite proudly 15 years old.

If that was the case, then *who was this child?*

The mystery girl sat up herself fully, rubbing at her face still, as if trying to get rid of her tiredness with physical action. She saw him out of the corner of her eye, turning to look at him, eyes wide open - surprise and confusion quite evident.

Those eyes - the silvery gray color of them - gave her away, and Ingo suddenly had the sinking feeling he knew exactly who this child was, and what might have occurred, as ridiculous and far-fetched as it seemed.

"... Ingo?" The little girl spoke up, suddenly freezing in place at the sound of her own voice - eyes showing her shock. She seemed to have just noticed what was going on as well, a hand going over her neck

Oh.

Oh no.

What did Arceus *do* ?

The small girl stood up on her little legs - wearing what seemed to be a miniature version of her galaxy team uniform, and her handkerchief was perhaps a bit too big on her head. She looked down at herself, then her hands, which went to her head, squishing her own cheeks., before letting go and letting the arms fall to her sides.

She looked at him, then down at her little hands, then back at him with such intense bewilderment, it would be funny if he was not feeling the same emotion, and possibly sharing the same expression in his eyes.

"... Y'are Ingo, right?" Her little voice was familiar, despite the higher tone.

"... Only if you are Akari" He responded, and got a confirming nod from the child. He was at least happy that the child was who he thought it was. "... We seem to have been transferred to the wrong track… and the wrong cars, as well." He pointed out

"No kiddin" She huffed, little fists at her sides. "I'm small! An- an' you look… kinda different?" she pat her own face, as if trying to point out his own face "Ya don't got wrinkles. Younger?"

That would make sense. "Well… judging by *your* size, we are about.. 10 years off?" He reasoned, starting to stand, feeling a very distinct lack of back pain as he straightened himself out. He stretched his arms up, and flexed his hands. No pain in his shoulders, either

He still felt strong, so he didn't lose his muscle at least.

Which was… Good. He had a feeling he was going to need it. He took a moment to look at his hands again. They were still scarred from Hisui, but they did not ache from weathered use and whittling in his spare time. He was himself, but not himself. Such an *odd* sensation. Why would his body be younger, but he was still worn and scarred by the passage of time?

"Hm… seems like I am back in my mid twenties. If we truly are 10 years off" He reasoned, and saw Akari grab the kerchief that was falling out of her hair before she looked back up at him.

Akari seemed to be doing the math in her head, and then gasped in shock. "Wait- you were only in y'r thirties??"

"I was 35, yes" he clarified. "I am reasonably certain, anyway."

She didn't seem to believe him, but looked past and around him, seeing something off in the distance "Where are we?" She questioned "We gotta get to Arceus! Or Dialga! I don't wanna be this small again! It *sucks* ! I hate being tiny!!"

Ingo turned around - following her eyes - to see a cityscape in the near distance, recognizing a particular skyscraper. "It… I know that

building…" He pointed "That is Nimbasa. We are outside of Nimbasa City - we are in Unova…. My home."

"At least we're in the right region" Akari grumbled, arms as crossed as they could be to match her expression. "Right place, wrong time, what rotten luck!"

He huffed, agreeing with the frustration of their bizarre situation "Perhaps we will be able to orient and think about our next step better after some food and rest in the city" he recommended "We are both safe for now, but even in the future, we will need shelter.

"Mmh" The child grumbled a bit, still clearly not satisfied with their current plight "I guess so…"

"We will be able to see if we were displaced in time, or if something occurred when we traveled" he reasoned "For all we know, this is the correct time, but we are the ones changed"

Akari tilted her head at that "I guess that makes sense - that would suck though!"

Ingo managed not to let out any sort of laugh at her petulant pout. "Are you oriented enough? Any maintenance required?" he asked, adjusting his coat - which was still in tough shape"My clothing is still quite comfortable, and it seems that Arceus was… courteous with your clothing"

"I's mini" She pointed out, pulling at her tiny uniform.

"It is, yes" Ingo nodded

The child let out a frustrated groan yet again, lolling her head back. " Agggghhhhhhhh - Le's go already. The sooner i'm bigger the better!!"

As Ingo straightened out his hat, he realized that he seemed to know where they were, the longer he looked around. That was good - *very* good. It meant that his memory was returning to him, and in this situation, that could only be a good thing.

"There is a train station just a short walk from here." he recalled, pointing through the wood with his left hand "We must return to the proper track for safety…" his voice trailed off for a moment, hands falling to his belt - his Pokemon, he still had them. Thank the dragons.

“Miss Akari, do you still have your Pokemon?”

She suddenly reached for her little belt bag, and felt her pokeballs, quietly counting them out loud “- Six! Y-yes! Yes! All of ‘em!” She nodded in relief, even now, she noticed how heavy the bag was on her little frame.

“Good.” Ingo nodded, looking ahead yet again at the forest, then back to her “We shall get on our way then, yes? I know what direction to go”

Akari nodded, coming closer to him and craning her head to look up at his face, which seemed to be more difficult for her, as he was now even taller than before since he was no longer slouching “Ugh, too tall”

“I am still an adult, and I reached my full height around this time” he recalled “You are now… younger. Smaller”

Akari pouted up at him with her arms crossed.

Oh, that was cute. He couldn’t take that face seriously

“Are you prepared for our walk? All maintenance checks done? It will not be a long walk, but I want to be sure that we are fully functional for the upcoming tracks” Ingo asked.

She thought for a moment, and then looked at the kerchief in her hand that she’d pulled out of her hair. “i’s too big f’r my head” she lamented “but I don’ think i got any room anywhere t’put it”

“Hm..” Ingo knelt down onto one knee, still taller than here, but making her not have to crane her neck so hard. “Let me see”

She offered the white kerchief, and he took it in his hands, unfolding and refolding it, clearly having an idea right as she handed it over to him.

“Might I?” he offered the wrapped fabric, and she nodded, allowing him to wrap the kerchief around her head like a headband, tying it simply but firmly, and brushing out her hair for a moment before

standing back up.

“There. All set and ready?”

She nodded, giving him a pleased, toothy grin. “All systems oberational!”

Oh, dragons above as if she wasn’t adorable enough as a teenager. Now she was painfully cute. He felt the need to grasp at the area over his heart, but collected himself as quickly as possible.

He cleared his throat, pointing towards the city “All Aboard! Next Stop! Nimbasa City!!”

Akari was having to speed walk just to keep up with his rather slow gait though the sparse woods

The curse of being tall, Ingo had to surmise, and he was trying to keep his steps smaller, too.

“Ugh, ya got too long’a’legs!” Akari complained with a whine

“Longalegs?” he looked at her with a tilted head at her mispronunciation “I am just tall”

“Too tall!” She stomped her little foot

“I would argue that you are too short,” he responded.

“I’m jus’ little!” She argued

“And I am just tall” he retorted

Akari just groaned, and she heard an amused snort from the adult.

“Can you keep up with me, do you need any help?” He asked.

“I can walk!”

“That is not what I asked”

Instead of answering him, she decided to rush ahead of him a few paces, and put her hands on her hips as she stood before him “I’m fine!”

He wasn’t sure if his expression came off as unimpressed. But he hoped not. He was trying to keep her occupied during their walk, after all, not to offend her. “Whatever you say, Miss Akari”

She pouted at him yet again - saying nothing - and they continued on their walk with Akari practically taking up a light jog to keep up with him.

Ingo let himself take in their situation now that he felt more in control of it, allowing the analytical part of his mind to take over for a second as he took inventory.

They had asked Arceus for the favor of being returned to their home. Akari specifically requested to be taken to Unova for Ingo’s sake, as he’d only just recalled his home region, and it seemed wise to assist with the return of his memories. However, it was fairly obvious now that there was some confusion on the return date and time.

Quite a lot, to be humorously frank.

He felt *very* similar to his older self - a decade *was* a long time, but the age of your body is often a more personal feeling - more internal than external. Once you’re in your mid twenties, feeling old is just that… *feeling*

And internally, he did *certainly feel different.*

Could one truly feel younger? He certainly did. Even if he had the same hair and scars (if he had the ones on his hands, he assumed that the one on his face and torso were also still there). He also didn’t seem

to have any more back pain - he'd consider that an unequivocal win.

But he wasn't really the one having a hell of a time, so to speak.

The five year old having to run to keep ahead of him was his primary concern at the moment.

He *assumed* that she was five years old. That age seemed to make the most sense. He was a decade younger, and so was she, and she had recently turned 15 before they'd left Hisui.

His thoughts once again lingered on himself for a moment. He felt weird enough only being 25 after being 35. The difference between his age and hers was … disorienting. He could only imagine how she felt. He was somewhat relieved that he was keeping her occupied with a dialog.

She was *also* keeping herself busy by running to keep up with his rather relaxed stride. Did he really have such big steps?

They reached the station with no issue after about an hour of walking. And with no people waiting there - something he was a bit thankful for. He sat himself on the bench, and checked the time on a nearby analog clock. This train was very reliable, and always had been since he was a child, so he recalled. Every hour on the hour, if his spotty memory served correctly. They had 10 minutes left.

"Come sit, Miss Akari. The train will be here soon" He pat the bench with one hand

She tilted her head at him just a tad "You know that?"

He nodded "I do. I remember the schedule"

She seemed surprised at this, and climbed up onto the bench using her hands and legs. He should have assisted her, but her quick movements caught him off guard.

"What else! What else do you 'member?? Rememberin's great!" She sat on her knees, bouncing excitedly next to him

“Well, I remember that, at this time, my brother and I were working on the Battle subway as depot agents-”

“YOU GOT A BROTHER?!” She interrupted with wide eyes

“I believe I have always had one. The man in white. He is my twin”

“A TWIN??” She bounced on her knees with a squeal

“Akari, please, refrain from shouting.” Ingo admonished lightly

“But you’re always shouting!” She argued

“That is just my natural voice”

“No way”

“Yes way!” He acted offended, though there was a certain playfulness in his eyes.

Their banter made the ten minutes fly by, and they boarded the train (Which was free, as is all public transit in Unova) with no issue, finding a two-seat aisle, Ingo giving Akari the window seat - which she took with a certain excitement

Her wide eyes stared out the window with sheer wonder as the scenery passed her by in the windows “Whoa.. Unova’s pretty!”

“I do think that the woods of Unova have a particular beauty to them. You would quite like Anville Town” Ingo commented

“Anville Town?”

“That is where I am from”

“You remember where you’re from?! Tha’s so great” Akari gave him such a wonderful expression.

“I have been remembering quite a lot since our arrival, despite our uh, rather dramatic misplacement.” he admitted with a slight shrug.

Akari - seemingly without even thinking - pulled herself over and into his lap “Tell me more! Tell me more about your twin! I wanna know!”

she practically begged, vibrating with excitement

Ingo pushed down his mild alarm at her actions, and took a quick breath. It was quite a ride until they got to Nimbasa City - the skyscrapers truly made it look closer than it actually was.

Some storytelling wouldn't hurt to pass the time.

And so he just started with Anville town, and with Emmet - oh, he was so relieved that he could talk about Emmet.

His chest ached as he spoke, but talking about his twin brother made him excited to eventually see him again. They would be returned to their correct time and ages soon enough - and talking about Emmet only made the memories return more and more fresh in his mind.

Eventually, Akari started to look as if she was getting too tired to pay attention - she *had* been running to keep up with him, and then had bounced around as if he'd given her a bag of macarons while they were at the train station, even when sitting.

Ingo paused in his story-telling."... I can finish this story later, Akari. Perhaps some downtime is in order to maintain your car"

She giggled tiredly "Train stuff"

"I do use many train metaphors, yes. I am quite happy to know what I am referencing now" Ingo responded.

She just giggled more, and leaned her head against the insignia on his chest with a relaxed sigh "hmm"

It seems like for the next twenty minutes, he was to be a child's napping spot. She fell asleep almost immediately after shutting her eyes and left Ingo trapped in his seat.

Well, he wasn't about to wake her up

He turned his head, looking out the window as the forest turned to

suburbs, and suburbs turned to city over the course of their train ride. They were nearly there. The Pokemon center and pokemart were on the same street, and were just 2 minutes from the train station. He remembered that quite vividly.

He realized that he was remembering things as they became relevant to his current situation, which was… convenient.

He'd take what he could get for now. They had to get to a Pokemon center, eat something, take a shower, perhaps try to get some contemporary clothes for the sake of blending in easier.

They needed to firmly come up with a solid plan of action - to return to their actual place of origin.

Akari shifted slightly, letting out a tiny little snore.

One of his arms went around to keep her from getting jostled or falling as the train gently shook on the rails.

Things were peaceful and safe. They might be in an odd predicament - the wrong bodies in the wrong time, but they were safe, and nothing was actively a threat.

He'd appreciate it while it lasted.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Uh -Oh! Problems arise immediately!

Despite being a decade off, Nimbasa still felt distinctly like itself. Still big, still busy, still ever-changing and evolving.

It was comforting, in a way, if not a little disorienting.

Akari was pretty sluggish waking up from her nap, and he'd decided to carry her while she woke up so as to not delay them further. She was rather light, able to be rather effortlessly carried on one arm. Her little head rested firmly on his shoulder as she rubbed at her eyes with one hand.

"Hmm loud" she muttered to no one in particular.

"We are in a modern city, Akari. It is going to be loud" he reminded the girl, finding himself effortlessly weaving through the crowds, seeing the Pokemon Center's sign just down the street. They were almost there.

"Can we get some food soon?" She asked, almost shyly - though perhaps that was her 'I'm not totally awake yet' voice.

"Certainly." Ingo nodded "Refueling will be much needed for the both of us once we are clean and more appropriately dressed. We are quite lucky that the people of Nimbasa are not nosy" He pointed out, moving around a group of obvious tourists and their clearly beleaguered tour guide before bumping directly into someone, jolting back and getting a startled shout out of Akari.

"Ah, Apologies!" A familiar voice opened Akari's eyes - getting her abruptly wide awake, and she looked over at the man they'd bumped into- Ingo following suit

And Ingo's eye contact was made with a man who shared his face, his eyes, and his frown.

Oh, shit.

Akari, rather amusingly, was looking between the two of them with her own bewildered expression. Looking at one, then the other, then back again.

“Ingo! What are you-”

Emmet. Oh, it was Emmet. Emmet was approaching the stare-off.

When *Emmet* stopped and stared at the face-off, Ingo’s grip on Akari tightened considerably, and he abruptly twisted on his heel, rushing straight into the crowd behind them, right by the tourists-

“Wait!”

He wanted to turn around - sweet Sinnoh above he wanted to.

Seeing Emmet, even if this Emmett was younger than the one he knew and loved - nearly made him break down. But Akari’s weight in his arms reminded him that he was not here alone, that connecting with any version of his brother … or himself.. In this time was unwise. Perhaps even actively detrimental.

He turned into a pokemart as the crowd started to disperse, and came to full awareness when little hands pat at his face as he stood off to the side of the sliding doors.

Akari had a lot of concern painting her face as her little hands grabbed at his, as if trying to get his attention. That did work, funnily enough.

“Are- are you okay? That was uh, kinda crazy” she squeaked out “T’ought I was seein’ double”

He took a deep breath ".. Yes.. yes, I am alright. This does, however, pose an issue…"

"Hm?"

"They knew who I was, at least, in theory… I saw recognition in… "My" eyes" Ingo explained "If I know myself, and my brother, they will be looking for us. They will follow their curiosity to the end"

"Ooooh… and then what? Do you think they'd help us?" She asked

"... I honestly cannot say. But… we cannot interfere with the timeline in such a way, I suspect. I have a feeling that it is unwise"

"Hm…. well… you're really distinct with y'r eyes.. And y'r hair… " Her eyes lit up "Oh! I gotta idea!"

Ingo's head tilted in interest "Hm?"

"Pu' me down i gotta find somethin!" She started to squirm, giving him a solid startle and she both verbally and physically demanded to have her feet back on the ground.

He quickly put her down before she could fall, and was just about to admonish her before she rushed off into one of the aisles of the pokemart, making a combee line for the beauty section "Follow me!!"

He found her quickly, standing in front of the hair dye and pointing. "Pick one! You can dye it at the pokemon center, an' poof! Ya don' look like them anymore! It'll help!"

That… was not a terrible idea.

His eyes fell on the cheapest box - if only because he was genuinely unsure of the money that they had. Sure, he'd had money from his time that had been in his pockets when he'd left, but he didn't know how far it would get them. He needs to do something - perhaps a few battles on the way to wherever they'd be going next? He'd think about it more later.

He grabbed it, and motioned for the child to follow him to the

register.

The tired woman at the register seemed to barely notice them, nor the state of his rather dirty money, and the two of them were back outside with a bag in one of Ingo's hands, and Akaris little hand in the other

"Take care to not become uncoupled from me." Ingo reminded "For safety, we are taking an alternate route. The back way to the Pokemon center is not too long"

"Uh huh!" she nodded, giving his hand a squeeze "Got it"

He nodded back to her, and the two of them made it through the streets without running into.. Himself .. again - *thank the dragons* - and they walked right into the Pokemon center with no issue. As it was mid afternoon, it was quite busy, so there was a line for checking into the attached hostel. Akari had started leaning on his leg, but he paid no mind as the line moved sluggishly.

The nurse gave them a private room (he didn't even know they had any available, that was quite lucky with that - though perhaps it had something to do with the small child attached to his leg. He would not look a gift ponyta in the mouth) and Akari entered and crawled up on the mattress immediately "Haha! Actual real bed!" She laid flat with her head turned towards the open room. "Soft!"

"Comfortable?"

"Vvvvvvery!" She giggled

"Verrrrry?" he found himself imitating his brother

"Uh huh!" she responded yet again.

"Well, see if you can perhaps take a rest while I am dying my hair. This will take some time" He recommended.

"D'ya want help?" She asked.

He thought about how small her hands were, and how much of a disaster that was waiting to happen any assistance might be, despite the good intention for all of a second.

“No thank you. Please, do rest” he requested of her

“Mmmh, ‘kay” Akari laid her head back down

Thank the dragons.

He shut the door to the on-suite bathroom - they’d really lucked out with this room - and carefully read the instructions on the box for how to dye his hair. His flashing memory supplied that he had done this once in high school, so at least he was not a novice.

The color he’d grabbed was called “Corviknight” - so it was black? He’d have to see how it would look once his hair was dyed and dried.

At least he didn’t need any bleach.

He spent quite some time working carefully through his hair, suddenly realizing how long his braid was.

It was admittedly a little tedious, but at least it gave him some alone time to not think for a bit.

Many, many more minutes later than he was expecting, he washed his hair for the final time, and wrapped it in a black towel - thankful that it wouldn’t stain visibly after all the effort he’d taken to leave no mess.

There was a knock at the door

“Uh… Are ya done?” Akari asked, a yawn in her little voice. Had she woken up from her nap?

“I believe so, yes. Give me a moment to clean up and i shall be out”

“ ‘kay!”

Once he felt his hair was no longer dripping wet, he opened the door, taking the towel off of his head, the dyed hair mildly wavy and still a touch damp. Akari stared at him with wide, surprised eyes.

“Wha….” She tilted her head

“Hm?”

Akari pulled at her own hair a bit to look at it, before looking back at him, bouncing on the balls of her feet “I’s the same!”

Ingo blinked, taking in her short statement for a moment, before pulling at his own hair to bring it into his vision.

A deep, slate blue, nearly navy-black. Cobalt

Huh.

“Get it dry! All the way!!” She jumped up and down “I wanna see how close it looks to mine! Come on!!!” She was trying to hold back some giggles - as if attempting to hide her amusement at the coincidence.

Ingo found *himself* amused by her enthusiasm, and chuckled a bit, taking a seat on the bed, and rubbing the tower through his hair to dry it further.

After more than a few minutes - when it truly felt dry- Akari watched him braid it carefully, and then pulled at his hand to drag him over to the bathroom, trying and failing to get him to move faster with her little yanks.

Despite being half her previous height, she was just as stubborn as ever.

He allowed himself to get pulled into the bathroom, and without her asking, picked her up so that she could look into the mirror with him. The two stared, and they both looked rather surprised

… He had to admit, the resemblance was a *little* uncanny.

… *Okay, more than just a little*

They’d already had similar eyes - his gray color lighter than hers,

obviously - but the hair really did look the same. They could pass as family, like this.

Akari laughed incredulously a the mirror, “You acci-denally dyed your hair like my hair!” She pointed out, hand pulling on his braid for a second as if to further call attention to it with a head tilt. “Oops?”

“There are worse things, I assure you.” Ingo commented “At least I look different enough that I should not be mistaken for my “current” self” he contemplated “We will have to keep a low profile for the next few weeks. We have much traversing to do if we are to return to Hisui - Sinnoh - and have this situation fixed and our tracks righted.”

“Hmmm” Akari hummed, then almost jumped in his hold as if struck by lightning “ Wait - wait!! I gotta idea!!”

“Oh?”

“So, we gotta do lotsa travel, an’ we can’ say that we’re like, in the wrong time, so jus’ say y’r my dad!” She suggested with a rather light tone.

… Ingo was grateful that his face was so hard to read, else the girl feel the need to laugh at the expression he’d probably be making. Or hurt her feelings, which would be so much worse.

But… Despite the initial shock her words caused him, her plan did make sense. It would be much easier and safer to travel if they played as father and daughter. Uncle and niece might not be a close enough bond for how far they were going. Overly cautious authorities might get suspicious.

After all, he was already her “uncle”, “father” was just a level above that, right? That wasn’t much of a change for him, really.

And yet something about that title left him nervous, a churning in his diaphragm.

“... Okay” he conceded “That is a good Idea. But first, we must eat, rest, and check a map so that we might properly orient ourselves for the upcoming journey” He reasoned.

Akari nodded in agreement with his statement “I’m hun’ry”

“As am I. “ Ingo commented, before walking out of the bathroom with the child still in his one arm. “There should be food downstairs. Do you wish to wash up?”

“After!” Akari stated “I’m reeeeeaaaall hungry”

Ingo rose an eyebrow “I will hold you to that, now that we have access to running water. I insist that daily showering is a must”

She nodded again, pulling at the lapel of his coat as if to urge him down the stairs with her in tow

“Lets go!”

Some light, free food in the Pokemon center cafe (The food was always free there) and a slightly frustrating search for an international transit map later, Ingo was sitting and looking at the “Inter-Regional Transit” atlas attentively while Akari took a shower. It had taken him a few moments - as he’d had to help her get the shower going, since she was too small to reach any of the knobs

Taking a plane was out of the question - flights required paperwork that neither of them had currently, charters also required licenses and IDs.

By boat was much easier, but much longer.

They’d get on a cruiseliner in Castelia City with its end port in Sinnoh - with a stop at the Galarian port of Circhester, and then to the port of Canalave City.

There was no direct port in Snowpoint, and the only other port was in Sunnyshore, which was about the same distance away from the mountain - and whose cruise was several days longer. Canalave City was their best bet for expediting their trip.

It was a two week journey just to get to Sinnoh from Unova - they really were from opposite sides of the globe - and unless they could procure further transportation such as bus or car, another four days of travel from Canalave to Mount Coronet.

He huffed a bit at the timeline. That was going to be a long time for poor Akari to be stuck as a five year old, but they had to maintain that low profile. Other transit simply wasn't an option.

He couldn't risk being found out by his contemporary self. Not after making such blistering, obvious eye contact. He'd seen the recognition in his own face - as if staring right into a fun house mirror.

He sighed deeply, and leaned back to the wall the bed was against, letting his head thud against the painted plaster.

He shut his eyes - not to sleep - but to breathe.

They had a long journey ahead of them.

"So… You bumped into this guy" Elesa started

"Yes" Ingo confirmed

"He looked just like you"

"Not precisely. But more than enough" Ingo clarified

Elesa tilted her head "You said he went into the pokemon center with the little girl? And you didn't follow him after that." She repeated what he'd said just minutes ago.

Ingo nodded, rubbing his forehead as if to stave off a migraine - or perhaps he already had one - he was having a hell of a day, truly.

“I am Emmet! I managed to get a photo before he disappeared” Emmet came into the living room, holding up his phone as he marched right toward Elesa “It is finally charged up! Look!”

Elesa looked at the photo on Emmet’s phone and her eyes widened, taking in the details of this man - this doppelganger.

“…. Oh uh… wow uhm…. Holy shit” Elesa managed.

“Holy shit indeed” Ingo huffed, hand through his hair, leaning back on the couch. “We do not have a third sibling, do we?”

“And a niece? I mean… the girl and him have the same eyes” Elesa pointed to the small girl in the man’s arms, taking a second to zoom in to get a slightly better look at the child.

“Oh dragons above” Ingo rubbed his forehead “I feel a headache coming on”

“Well.. what are you two gonna do about it?” Elesa asked

“No idea,” Ingo admitted, hand over his eyes now.

“Well, the battle subway construction is finally underway, and they will not need us again for some time.” Emmet pointed out.

“What are you insinuating?” Elesa’s brow rose.

“If whoever that is *is* a lost sibling, then we can’t leave that stone unturned” Emmet reasoned “and if he isn’t, well… we need to know if this is some kind of pokemon related shenanigan! Is it a zoroark, a very talented Ditto?”

“… I could see how he was feeling… His eyes” Ingo commented, stopping Emmet’s train of thought.

“What about them?” Elesa asked, finally handing Emmet’s phone back to him.

“He seemed startled, alarmed… scared.” Ingo commented “As if he was being… chased? Was running from something.”

“.. Do you think he is?” Elesa asked.

“He might be”

Emmet hummed “Well, we can’t have that! Verrrrrry unpleasant to think of that!”

“.. What are you two planning on doing, exactly?” Elesa’s brow rose curiously

“... follow them.” Ingo stated, looking over to her “See what they are doing, where they are going. . . I need to know what’s going on”

“That seems a little extreme” Elesa warned.

“This is an extreme circumstance” Ingo reasoned, sitting back up again.

“I am Emmet. I agree” Emmet nodded, arms crossed.

Elesa sighed “Well, just… keep me updated, and call Dreyden, hm? He’ll want to know if you guys are up to shit again” She requested.

“Of course” Emmet assured her, and with said assurance, that conversation threat ended.

When Elesa left for the night, Ingo held his head in his hands, leaning forward on the couch. Emmet nursed a coffee as he looked at his brother.

“Ingo?” He cautiously called for his attention.

“... He looked like he’d been through hell, Emmet” Ingo pointed out “I cannot fathom what they went through to look so… haggard and worn”

“.. I saw.” Emmet responded “They both looked like that. We must find out where they went… We have to help. I feel like it is our calling right now.”

Ingo appreciated that he and his brother were, as always, of the same mind. A trait that he wouldn’t trade for the world, if it meant they followed this lead.

Whoever this man was - *him, not him, a scared zoroark* - they needed help. That much was clear…

And it was help that the brothers could, in theory, provide.

Well… It didn't hurt to try.

Ingo and Akari had gotten quite lucky that there had been a clothing drive at the pokemon center the night they'd arrived - cosmic confluence? Had Arceus been kind? Probably not. Coincidence was far more likely.

Going through the clothing (after getting the OK from Nurse Joy, of course), Ingo had found some decent clothing in his size - two pairs of pants, a few long and short sleeved shirts, and even some walking shoes - a blessing, truly, when paired with wool socks.

Akari, on the other hand, was as indecisive as she'd ever been about fashion back in Jubilife - perhaps moreso! There were more choices, after all.

He wondered if it had been a good thing for not that he'd had to give her a limit on the clothing - he'd found them a nice, sturdy backpack, and they had to keep their load light for all the travel they'd be doing - and she ended up with some leggings, a pair of pants, cute little sneakers, two dresses and two shirts as well as a bright yellow jacket and a pair of thick snow overalls.

"I's gonna be cold in Snowpoint!!"

That was a good point.

He grabbed himself a coat as well - a long black one with a gray houndstooth design on it - surprisingly stylish.

He also made sure that Akari found something akin to Pajamas for herself - he just got joggers and a t- shirt. He wanted to make sure they were both comfortable for sleep - now that they had access to actual beds again

Once they'd made their picking and eaten something substantial in the impressive PokeCenter Cafeteria, they returned to their room once more, and Akari demanded they go over their plans one more time - "Cause I wanna be super sure" - had been her reasoning.

"Kay! So we're takin' the train t' Castellia City, then gettin' on a boat that goes to Galar, then Canalave City!"

"Indeed." he nodded "It will be a long journey, but it is the best option we have."

"Eh, i's no' tha' long" She shrugged, then let out a rather long yawn

"I believe it is time to rest our cars, yes. We have performed much maintenance and upkeep this evening. Rest is necessary for us to be at full capacity tomorrow to start on our tracks." Ingo pointed out.

Akari just nodded in agreement, already on the bed, she just lied back and rested her head on the mattress with a small, pleased grumble.

"Mmph"

"Comfy?" He asked, mildly amused.

"Better than a mat!" She responded with a turn of her head.

"I must concur" He nodded in agreement

Before any further banter could occur, there was a sudden knock at the door.

"Ahem, hello sir?"

Nurse Joy?

He cautiously told Akari with a single hand motion not to move, and he went up to the door, opening it about halfway.

"... Hello?"

“Hello, sir! I just realized that I never got your name for the guest book records” the nurse sheepishly admitted, holding a clipboard in her hands along with a pen. “It's been a busy day, but I do need that information for our records. If you could please.”

Ah. yes. Name

He’d been thinking about this in the background, forming a basic backstory for their travels - he was going to share his concepts with Akari tomorrow morning, but there was no time like the present, it seemed.

“Nobori Sho” he responded, not letting himself think too hard about it as to avoid stuttering “And my daughter, Akari Sho”

Nobori Sho. Sounded Sinnohan, Hisuian. Sho was a common last name.

“Ah, yes, thank you so much, Mister Sho” She nodded, writing down their names with a certain focus before tapping the clipboard “Have a good evening!”

Seemed good enough.

He shut the door, and sighed. *Nobori Sho. Sinnohan, father to Akari Sho* . That was his identity until Arceus could fix this predicament

“Nobori?”

He looked up to see Akari’s curious look

“... When my brother and I took a Sinnohan class in school, we were told to pick Sinnohan names. I chose Nobori. He used Kudari”

“Hehe, rhymes” Akari pointed out.

“That was a part of the reason” he nodded, and she giggled at that

“Akari Sho.” She said her “name” out loud, thinking it over. “Sounds nice. I like it” She nods “perfect name”

“Do you remember your original last name?” Ingo asked curiously.

The girl tilted her head “... I think… I think it was Murokoshi”

Akari Murokoshi. Huh.

“That is also a nice name” He points out.

“Eh, I never liked it. I’s not my mom's last name. I’s my father’s” Akari admitted, recalling that particular detail seemingly on the fly. Ingo had assumed that her memories were coming to her as they came to him - on demand. This was only confirming that, as her expression showed that she was confused at the information she just told him

“What is your mother’s last name?”

“...Fletcher”

.. He could see why she did not use ‘ *Akari Fletcher* ’. Didn’t really roll off the tongue.

“Yeah” She ended up responding to his unspoken comment “But my dad stinks so I’d rather be Akari Sho” She yawned, not elaborating on that surprising life detail. “Wha’s- what's your real last name?”

“Wagner… Ingo Wagner” He answered, nodding to himself as he repeated his name to himself.

“... That sounds nice too” She muttered, finally looking as if sleep was coming for her little head.

“.... Sleep, Akari. We have a long journey starting tomorrow” He encouraged, pulling at the blanket

“Whaddabout you?” her tired voice slurred.

“I will sleep very soon. I assure you”

“Where? This’s the only bed…”

“It is a very big bed, Akari. We will fit with no issue” He assured her.

She tilted her head, but rolled over on the bed to see that itt was in fact quite big. She didn’t know bed sizes (Did she?) but it did seem like more than enough or two adults, so an adult and a kid would be no problem.

“Hmmmm -kay” She muttered as he placed the blanket over her, right up to her chin.

“Sweet dreams to you, Akari” He quietly requested of her.

“Mmh, you too” She muttered, before a deep exhale showed that she’d fallen asleep - it seemed her ability to instantly fall asleep was something she’d learned at a young age.

Ingo sighed deeply, rubbing his face and trying to fight a tired groan. Akari was a rather light sleeper despite how quickly she fell into it. He needed to remain quiet.

He let himself lie down as Akari turned towards the wall, and thought over their next few weeks of travel for what had to be the 30th time that evening.

The “father” moniker was still making him anxious in an odd way - more than any of the logistics of the actual travel they would be doing.

Why was that? It wasn’t like Akari didn’t accidentally call him … *that* … back in Hisui. She’d always been so embarrassed when it happened, it was rather amusing - particularly when Rei was around when she did. The teasing she’d gotten from Rei only made her more flustered. He’d always brushed it off. Uncle was fine - he was happy being “Uncle Ingo”

But *father* … ugh, he needed to not think about it.

His eyes shut, and he let out a deep, deep exhale.

Sleep did, eventually, come.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The long haul begins!

Getting money for their various modes of transit (and for other necessities) was not as hard as Ingo thought it might be - thank the dragons. Nimbasa was a battle city, and Ingo was a more-than-competent battler, so going into the battle district and challenging a few people in and around the gym got him some easy money - and having Akari there as moral support certainly helped (Especially since he had to only rely on Gliscor, as he didn't want to overwhelm his other pokemon as of yet. He still had to explain things to his main partner pokemon, but that would have to come later).

By the time noon had come around, he had more than enough money for transit to Galar and food, at the very least.

To top it off, he hadn't been recognized, and while it took conscious effort, had only ever introduced himself as Nobori Sho, and introduced Akari as his daughter.

Akari, on the other hand, didn't seem to have any similar issues with calling him "dad". Getting right on it the moment she had to talk to him outside of the pokemon center.

The first few times nearly gave him heart palpitations.

Dad really *was* different from uncle

But as of now, after those fights, they were now in the waiting area for the boat - a cruise, really - for their trip. A several day trip from Unova to Galar, and then Galar to Sinnoh - the longest trek was that part at over a week on the boat.

He was gonna be "dad" for a while, wasn't he?

"Da-ad!"

Akari returned to their bench with some food and drink from a nearby stall - one large pretzel, one fruit parfait, and two bottles of water. It seemed to be a bit difficult for her to carry, but she was managing quite alright.

He'd told her they needed to remain lean when it came to food, but she was clearly so excited to have some real, not-pokemon-center food that he was unsurprised when she came back with the parfait.

What did surprise him, was when she handed it to him.

"I wanted the pretzel" was the only explanation she gave upon seeing his confusion, climbing up to sit next to him on the bench, and placing the bottled waters between them before taking a generous bite of her pretzel.

He looked at the parfait in its clear plastic cup - a relatively simple, no frills dessert with kiwi and strawberry. It looked quite good, and very fresh.

He took the spoon out of it, and began to eat, deliberately pacing himself.

The sweetness nearly overwhelmed him, but he didn't stop eating.

It was *divine*, truly. He'd forgotten how much he liked sweet foods. He needed to pace himself - he'd get cavities at this rate-

"Pardon me! Might we sit beside you?"

Both Ingo and Akari froze at the familiar voice, but Ingo braved a glance upwards.

A familiar grin was looking down at him - and just to the right, an extremely familiar frown.

"My brother and I wish to sit - we are waiting to board the ship, and there is very little seating! Might we?" Emmet requested, smile wide and polite.

Did he.. Not recognize him? Was the dyed hair truly enough?

Highly unlikely.

Ingo's eyes fell behind Emmet, and saw.. Himself… again - such a bizarre thing to see - who wasn't looking at him - eyes staring over at one of the many food stalls in the station.

"Sure" Akari smartly answered for them, taking another bite of her pretzel

Ingo ended up just nodding in agreement with Akari, deliberately taking another spoonful of the nearly-finished Parfait.

Emmet sat next to Ingo, and "Ingo" sat on the other side of Emmet - seemingly as far away from his dyed-haired double as he could without becoming uncoupled from his brother. His eyes fell to Akari, who shyly gave him a little wave.

"I am Emmet!" the smiling twin introduced "And this is my dear twin, Ingo!" He motioned to the man being introduced, who seemed to deliberately not look at the only other adult in the conversation.

"I'm Akari!" Akari jumped in- hoping to save "her" Ingo from any nervousness at the situation. "This is my dad, his name's Nobori" she nervously kicked her feet, taking yet another bite from her large pretzel

Ingo- Nobori, he had to go by Nobori, especially *now* - spotted the bewilderment and alarm in his past self's eyes, staring down at the little girl.

Nobori took a second to clear his throat after the staring didn't stop "Good to meet you. Please refrain from staring at my daughter. You are making her uncomfortable"

"Ah uh," Ingo cleared this own throat "My apologies," he muttered - partially to himself "You look quite alike…"

"Strong genes" Nobori stated rather plainly, getting a giggle from the girl, who was just about finished with that pretzel at this point

“Where are you guys going?” She asked, trying to sound as innocent as a curious five-year-old could.

“Oh, we are headed to Sinnoh to as a favor for our sister, Elesa” Emmet answered “Where are *you* going?”

“Sinnoh! My mom is there” Akari answered - it wasn’t a lie, not technically!

“...So you’re going home then?” Ingo asked, leaning a bit so he could be seen by the child.

“In a sense,” Nobori answered for them.

“It’s complicated,” Akari added, taking one last bite of her pretzel.

Emmet’s eyes showed that he found her answer verrrry interesting, but he said nothing else, taking a sip of his own bottle of soda, eyes going elsewhere.

Ingo- Nobori - was grateful that the conversation died, as more and more people came into the waiting area, and the standing room became rather dense.

The crowd was starting to make Akari squirm, no longer distracted by her food, she was staring down at her hands.

Nobori imagined that being so small surrounded by so many adults was uncomfortable, should his own memory of childhood be any indication.

And so - now mostly done with the parfait, he wiped off his hands, and grabbed the little girl around the waist, lifting her into his lap - getting a startled expression from her.

“Huh?”

“You looked uncomfortable” he commented, his focus on lessening her very obvious anxiety.

“Oh..” she looked away for a minute, before giving his jacket a shy tug.

Ah…

Opening the jacket, he wrapped the child up in it, and she seemed immediately calmer, leaning into him, her face shoved in his sweater.

He'd done the same for her as a teenager in inclement weather back in Hisui, so it didn't feel too odd, though - yet again - her size was a factor here. Before, it was a courtesy. Now, it felt.. Needed.

Ingo - the present day Ingo - kept looking over at Nobori and Akari, raising his anxiety just slightly. Lucky for everyone, Emmet started speaking again - reading the mood as excellently as always.

"So…" Emmet pat his legs a-rhythmically "What has brought you to Unova? Sinnoh is quite a ways away!"

Nobori thought about the question for a few seconds "I have lived here for many years, but I have not been back to Sinnoh in some time. Akari also has not seen her mother in some time as well, so we are making the journey."

"I wanna see my mom" Akari added, sincerely, turning her head to look at Emmet.

"Well, why not take a plane? Much faster!" Emmet questioned

"I am afraid we do not have the funds for such a flight" Nobori answered "We are traveling rather light due to this"

"Plus, dad doesn't like heights," Akari added cheekily, getting an unimpressed look from Nobori. Ingo snorted.

"Then we are one in the same!" Emmet admitted with a chuckle "I quite dislike heights as well, that and we are overdue for a proper vacation, which is why we took up the favor for our sister. My brother and I work in the battle subway, see, and it is currently-"

"Undergoing heavy renovations. In preparation for a new battle line" Ingo finished

"The Multi Line" Nobori named it

Something seemed to … *glint* , knowingly, in Emmet's eyes "Yes, that is it! My brother and I will be heading that battle lines! We are verrrry excited."

"Battle line?" Akari looked up from her little enclave in Ingo's jacket

“Like, in a subway? Is that safe?”

“It is being built for that purpose! The multi-line will be reinforced, which is why it is not open yet!” Emmet explained “So all types of battles will be permitted and accessible on the line, with a few exceptions, of course!”

“Wow… “ The little girl reached over to a little backpack she’d had, if only to wrap her arms around it. She was still leaning against Nobori, but her attention was on Emmet “And you battle inside the subway car? You and your brother?”

“We do!”

“It's what we love most” Ingo added, looking up at Nobori “It is our favorite job. We have never been happier that we are about to live our dreams”

“That’s really nice!” Akari commented with a nod and a smile

“Might I ask for your occupation Mister… Nobori?” Ingo asked, eyeing his doppelganger with what - at a surface level - must have looked like a pretty neutral stare.

Nobori was aware of the suspicion in his eyes. But this was a question he’d rehearsed-

“I am a walking guide. I work in guiding people throughout the parks in the far north” He answered

“He’s really good at it too!” Akari added, recalling him coming up with the backstory before they left that morning.

“I conduct others carefully and thoroughly through dangerous trails” he stated “Safety is of utmost importance in my job, as I am sure you understand”

“Of course” Ingo responded “Safety first”

“Always” Nobori agreed.

The conversation paused when Akari audibly yawned “Ughhh why am I tiii-ired?”

“You are tiny” Nobori commented “Tiny people get tired a lot”

Akari groaned dramatically “Ughhhh I wanna be big!”

“Soon, Akari” the man recalled vaguely.

Ingo held down an amused chuckle, Emmet did not.

“She is very cute” Emmet complimented

“Thanks” Akari gave him a thumbs up with one hand, already looking like she was ready for a nap

After that conversation finally died, the boarding announcements were made, and thankfully, the twin brothers were called first.

Once they were out of sight, Ingo exhaled deeply, Akari looking up at him with concern.

“Are you okay?” Akari asked, pulling at his shirt to get his attention.

“Yes…” he sighed, looking down “But.. They seem to know” He pointed out

“.. Yeah, they do.” She acknowledged “But. we gotta keep up the ruse, right?”

Ingo nodded “Yes. Now-”

Just before he could continue, their boarding number was called

“Ah, It is time to get going”

Akari nodded, getting off of his lap, and grabbing at his hand as he stood up

“Take care not to become uncoupled!” She parroted him, getting a small smile from the man.

“Indeed.” he nodded back, before looking up and pointing towards the doors that led to the gangplank “All aboard!”

“Nobori- Nobori!” Ingo sat on the bed in their room, exasperation clear and present in his voice “Could he have possibly been more obvious??”

“It is only obvious to us, Ingo” Emmet commented, emptying his small suitcase.

“Still!” He huffed “... I suppose we can rule out lost triplet, then”

“Indeed. He seems to be.. You, which I can only imagine is disorienting” Emmet admitted, hanging up his coat in the cabin closet.

“... Then who is the child?”

“He said that she was his daughter. Perhaps they are from an alternate dimension! What pokemon is known for those? Yveltal?”

“Giratina, Emmet. Where did you get Yveltal from?”

Emmet thought it over “... Not sure. But, anyway, perhaps he is from another dimension!”

Ingo contemplated it, but then asked,“... Then where is his Kudari?”

Ingo’s expression was verrrry telling to his twin.

“... Well, we’ll have to find out, hm? For all we know, this Ingo is a single child!”

“I cannot believe that for even a moment” Ingo huffed, recalling the look of surprise and near-pain the other Ingo had on his face when he’d seen Emmet that first time “ Before I start thinking too much… Shall we go eat?”

Akari had fallen asleep on the bed the minute they got into their small inside cabin.

Boats were pretty cheap to travel on when you consider everything that was included, but the accommodations were minimal. Comparatively, at least, to other modes of transit unless you wished to pay a premium. However, the two of them were used to sleeping on dirt, so this was an upgrade.

And Akari felt safe enough to sleep in their private room. That was… that was good.

Ingo rubbed his face, going over the conversation he had with his previous self and his brother over and over in his head, thinking over every moment until it was causing a headache

A part of him had nearly broken down into (admittedly justifiable) tears at simply seeing and interacting with Emmet (even if this wasn't the Emmet he was supposed to be reuniting with). But having Akari there helped. He was focused on conducting them safely back to Sinnoh, on keeping the two of them safe.

He had to keep her *safe*.

Ingo sat himself down on a chair by the television, not tired enough to sleep, but not wanting to leave her alone during her nap - he needed the alone time, anyway.

He took out his pokeballs, contemplating which pokemon would be the safest to take out that would both fit in the room and not awaken Akari.

After a second, he released Gliscor into the room

Luckily, Gliscor was at least partially aware of the predicament, and seemed pretty calm when summoned from the pokeball. It looked around the room - its eyes falling on the bed, and looked at the small child sleeping on the bed with much interest.

“Do not wake her, Gliscor” Ingo warned

The pokemon gave him a funny face in response

“ *Don’t* ” Ingo pressed, as quiet as he could get his voice to go.

The pokemon looked back at the littler human, ever curious, but did not touch or wake her. He then returned to his trainer's side with a quiet, questioning trill.

“Yes, I know” He responded to the questioning look. “I will talk to the others as well about this, I assure you”

“Scor! ”

“I am aware that the dark hair is odd, thank you”

The pokemon sniggered at him, calming right down at the seeming reminder that his trainer was okay despite the visual change.

An hour or so passed, with Ingo releasing a few of his other pokemon to get them up to speed on the current situation and give them a moment to stretch. He had to go into the hallway to speak with Tangrowth, but that only took a few minutes. He’d let them out for more thorough “Leg stretching” later, when Akari was awake and ready to look around the ship. They’d already unmoored and were on their way, they had time.

The girl did eventually wake up just a few minutes after he returned from speaking with tangrowth.

“Mmh…” She grumbled, rubbing her face as she sat up, and looking over at Ingo, who was reading a magazine he’d found on the table - just a travel magazine, but it passed the time.

He looked up “Rest well?”

She nodded, yawning and stretching “Can we go get some food?”

“I am a bit peckish myself. But first, you must let your pokemon free so we can let them know what has happened.” Ingo instructed.

“Oh!” She bounced a bit on the bed in excitement “Tha’s a good

idea!”

She took out her four pokeballs from their place in her pack - she always kept a pretty small team, and looked them over to decide who to release first.

She grabbed one, and released her Samurott

“Sammy!” She called to get his direct attention.

“*Ro*!” the pokemon looked at her, expecting his teenager trainer, and the shock on his face made the girl laugh

“I’s me!” She assured, fighting off more giggles “I’m jus’... small”

The Samurott leaned its head over to her, and gave her a sniff, before letting out a startled sound - looking to Ingo as if he’d have an explanation.

“Arceus sent us to the wrong time” Was all the warden responded to the look with.

Samurott jumped a bit, and nudged Akari right in the stomach, which startled *her* and made her laugh “It’s okay! I’m okayyyy!”

It took a few more minutes before she managed to calm the Samurott, and returned it to its pokeball.

One down, three to go.

Akari’s Alpha Ponyta reacted very similarly to that, though was much harder to calm down than the Samurott, with Ingo having to step in to calm the pokemon that barely fit in the room.

Her Luxray was calmer, though he clearly thought that this was funny in some way, and made a point to lick her directly on the face, making her squeal in disgust.

“Ew! Ew! Back in your pokeball you meanie!” She recalled him, scowling adorably.

“I will get you a towel” Ingo went into the en-suite bathroom as he said so.

“T’anks” Akari muttered, her face still twisted in disgust - feeling - eugh - *damp*.

Ingo grabbed a little washcloth from the bathroom, and approached her, not bothering to hand it to her, and proceeded to wipe off her face carefully.

She gave him a weird look at the action, but he just awkwardly coughed “You still have your Zoroark left, yes?” Ingo asked.

She nodded, holding up the pokeball with both hands, looking a little worried.

“She’s gon’ be real confused” Akari commented

“That is why we are telling her” Ingo reminded, backing up from her to give the large pokemon room.

Akari gave a grimace. “Here we go..”

She tossed the pokeball, and the alpha Zoroark let out a “Zoh!” and stretched out before taking a loto at its surroundings for a moment. Its eyes caught Akari, and she stared with absolute bewilderment.

“Uh.. Hiya” Akari started “We’re in the wrong time. We’re goin’ back t’Sinnoh - Hisui so we can go where we’re s’posed to”

The Zoroark leaned down at Akari, and stared intensely at the small child

“ *Zo!* ”

Akari found herself lifted up and startled, before the pokemon climbed up on the bed and curled around her

“Oh my” Ingo commented, but didn’t intervene

“This is wha’ I was ‘fraid of” she huffed, before she was pinned by the Zoroark’s claw so very gently. “... Oh no”

Ingo grimaced as Akari was once again licked directly on the face, though this time it was clearly aimed at her hair, which made her start kicking futility

“Ew! Ew! I don’t need a bath!!” She whined

“You’re going to need one after this” Ingo commented - trying to hide how amused he was at this

“Zorh! ”

Akari just groaned as the licking at her hair continued.

It took a good while to calm the Zorark down and get her back in her pokeball, which they put back in Akari’s pack, and then back in her backpack.

“Phew..” Akari sighed, but wasn’t given much of a chance to decompress before Ingo spoke up

“Shower”

She turned her head sharply towards him with an upset expression “But food!”

“Shower first. The shower knobs are low enough for you to reach.” Ingo argued

“UghhhHHHHHHHH” Akari flopped on the bed “I don’t wannnaaaaahhhhhhhh”

Ingo gave an unimpressed look “If you do not bathe and get that Zoroark smell off of you, we cannot go to eat”

“But-”

“No, Akari. Listen to your father”

She gave him a sour expression that Ingo could not take seriously “I bought that ‘pon m’self, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did”

Akari rolled over to glare at him, but his face did not change - as it rarely did.

She finally got up, making a show of being inconvenienced as she went into the bathroom and shut the door behind her.

Huh. Teenagers and little children really aren't all that different after all.

Once she was finally not covered in pokemon drool and dressed in new clothes, they went to eat something and walk about the main deck, letting out one pokemon each - decidedly taking out the pokemon that wouldn’t raise any eyebrows - with Ingo letting out his Nosepass and Akari letting out her Luxray.

They managed to avoid Emmet and the other Ingo for the rest of the first day on the ship

Great. Now, they had to do it for another four days at sea before docking in Circhester

They’d try their best.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Confrontation, and getting to "know" each other!

The first night on the ship was a rocky one, unfortunately- though not due to any sort of seasickness from the swaying of the ship itself - this ship was far too large for seasickness to be much of an issue.

Ingo was woken up by a shuffling of fabric, and stilted breath on the pillow opposite of him on the king-size bed.

He didn't need to check the clock to know that it was still nighttime. He also didn't need the lights on to know that Akari was awake, curled up and trembling.

He sat up quickly at the whimpering, trying to keep his voice low "Akari? Akari, are you okay?"

She was trying to stop, clearly, with the deep breathing she was trying and failing to do, but she shook her head honestly, rubbing at her face "I's - i saw - i'was 'im again.." She wheezed a little.

Ah.. Ingo knew who "him" was.

He sat up fully, thinking on what to say next as he did so. Should he deal with this the same way he did when she was a teenager? Didn't hurt to try that first.

He placed a hand on her back, beginning to rub soothing circles in an effort to coax her out of her tense position. "Akari, tell me, where are we?"

"... On a ship?" She meekly answered, looking up at him.

"And is he here? In this time? On this ship with us? In this room?"

".. No" She responded.

"And he cannot find us. Just as he could not when we were in Hisui" He explained, continuing to rub her back, which seemed to be helping a little bit "We are safe. He is not here"

She sniffled, and just nodded, still feeling tense and stiff under his hand, her little fists trembling as they clenched the blanket.

Oh.. that wasn't working.

He went through his options, and he took a chance

He gathered the girl up in his arms, which seemed to startle her a bit, though she didn't react with much more than a flinch. He then leaned his back against the wall, and felt the child curl up tighter in his lap.

Her head went into his shoulder,and she sniffled again, voice wobbling as she spoke again.

"Wha' if he does find me..?" She questioned, her little voice weak and wheezing "He's - he was in the distortion world and- and he can go anywhere - what if-"

"No ."

She looked up at him, and he saw the wetness under her eyes. With a little trepidation, he wiped those tears with his thumb.

"He will not find us. And if he does, I am here to help you" Ingo reassured.

".. Really?"

"You should have never been there to fight him alone in the first place" he stated in confirmation, the hand on her face going to rub her head.

She seemed thoughtful, head against his chest, breathing calming considerably as the seconds ticked by

"... Can we go outside?" AKari requested in a small voice

Ingo mulled it over, before nodding "... I could also use some air. Surely"

Securing her with one arm under her, he stood up, and walked them

from their room on the lower deck, to the upper deck, which had a jogging trail open at all hours (or at the very least it wasn't gated off during the night)

The air was clean, but the sky was black with sparse stars, the ocean was somehow darker, but the subsound of the bobbing waves was welcome as background noise.

Akari yawned a little "y'member.. When we w're at the coastlands.. And you told me tha' thin' about the ocean?" She recalled, her arms now wrapped around his neck.

"... I recall that I told you that the ocean is a scary thing to me, but that I respect it" He recited

"Mhm… I never thought of it like tha'" She sleepily said "I always thought… it was relaxin', the waves… i's nice"

"Perspectives that differ are quite valuable, Akari"

"Mhm.. .guess so… " She managed, her head getting heavier on his shoulder.

"... Sleep, Akari. It's alright."

"Mmh.. t'anks daddy"

He prayed that she didn't hear his breath hitched. He would swear to himself later that his heart stopped

He took a deep breath, and could feel that she had - gratefully - fallen asleep on his shoulder.

Good. She needed to sleep.

… And he needed to have a conversation, it seemed.

"I know you are there." Ingo called out to the darkness behind the opened gate "You can come out. She is asleep"

After several, tense seconds, the contemporary Ingo turned the corner,

expression somewhat tense, but not threatening.

Despite this, Nobori found his free hand resting on Akari's back.

".. Emmet believes that you are in trouble" Ingo cut to the chase, arms crossed in front of him, keeping his distance from Nobori.

"... While he is not wrong, it is not dire" Nobori explained curtly in response "We are safe for now."

"... So you really are… Me?" Ingo asked, coming just a little closer, though not too close.

"... I suppose that I am"

Ingo stared at his scarred up, hair-dyed other, giving him a serious look over, before asking, "... Might I ask what happened to you?"

"I do not believe that to be wise" Was the response that he got - which wasn't super satisfying, but he continued. "Also, I would appreciate it if you continued to refer to me as Nobori. For now, at least."

"Can I ask why?"

"Lessen confusion, for one" Nobori explained "Another, Akari and I are traveling quite far, and I do not want anyone to know… who and what we are, for now. We are simply trying to return to where we came as safely as we can"

".. And where do you come from?"

".. The future" Nobori flatly answered

"You look to be the same age as I" Ingo pointed out

"That … is not intentional. I am not.. Supposed to look like this, and neither is Akari. It has been… disorienting" Ingo attempted to explain without giving anything specific away

"-Hah, knew it!"

The two men quickly turned their heads to see Emmet with a rather smug grin, hands on his hips and looking as if he'd appeared out of thin air "It's time travel! Is that why you are on a boat to Sinnoh? For the time god?"

"Ah.." Nobori cleared his throat "Yes. Though, please, Emmet. Keep your voice down. Akari is finally asleep. She needs her rest"

"Ah… apologies" Emmet managed to lower his voice several decibels "But… the future - how fascinating!"

"Where is your Emmet?" Ingo suddenly asked.

"... Waiting for me" Nobori answered.

That seemed to bring Emmet and Ingo comfort in tandem, and they fell into silence for some time, before Nobori readjusted the child, who grumbled just a bit before getting comfortable.

Ingo cleared this throat "Uhm. I wish to ask… She.. She called you *dad* "

Oh right. *That*

"She did, yes"

"... *Is* she…?" Ingo's syllable stressed

"Do I have a Niece?" Emmet asked, looking a little nervous at the question.

It was a heavy thing to ask - the nervousness was warranted.

Nobori huffed a bit, attempting to word this correctly"... She is important to me" he answered "we find it easier if she refers to me as "dad", for traveling's sake"

Ingo nodded "So, she is not-"

"-No"

Akari whined a bit at the noise "Mm shut uuuuup"

Emmet tried very, very hard to hide a snort

“Akari” Nobori’s tone was hushed “Apologies, please, return to sleeping”

She turned her head on his shoulder, seeing Ingo and Emmet staring at her, one much more intensely than the other. Her own tired eyes stared back for a few seconds

“Mmh..” she blinked tiredly, then gave them a little 'wave' where she opened and closed her hand a few times, before turning her head back into Nobori’s shoulder, and falling back to sleep in a matter of seconds.

“…. She is very cute” Emmet commented, his tone much quieter now

“I agree,” Nobori nodded, “but I must be getting her back to our room.. And you two must need sleep as well.”

“Will you let us help you?” Emmet asked “I … I will admit, this has been a wild last 24 hours, but if you truly are Ingo, and you are simply trying to return to your time, we want to help”

Ingo nodded in agreement with his brother

Nobori was surprised and touched in equal measure. He could feel tears wanting to come out, but he kept his expression even.

Just hearing Emmet, *seeing* Emmet, it was going to become overwhelming very quickly if he lingered on the thoughts for too long.

He took a deep breath “That… would be very kind of you”

Emmet’s smile grew into a grin

“Good night then. I look forward to a more thorough conversation tomorrow” Emmet tipped his baseball cap, and looked to Ingo “Ingo? Er, brother?”

“For clarity's sake, you can refer to me as Nobori” The time displaced brother stated

“Ahhh that does help, thank you!” Emmet nodded “Nobori then - good night!”

“Have a good night, both of you” Ingo nodded to his Nobori, who nodded back, and readjusted the sleeping child in his arms.

There was a certain gratitude in his eyes that was.. Bothering Ingo.

He’d think about it when they were back in their cabin.

“...Ingo?”

Emmet called from the bathroom, having just finished taking a shower.

“Hm?” Ingo looked up from his xtrans

“How are you?”

“... I am confused” Ingo admitted “but I feel better. I still have questions, however”

“Hah! As do I” Emmet left the bathroom in his pajamas

“Oh?”

“I do not know if he, or, *you* will answer them” Emmet admitted

“... Perhaps he does not need to” Ingo contemplated, putting down his xtrans

Emmet looked over at his brother, rubbing his hair with a towel. “And why is that?”

“.. I think that he is scared. But he will not admit it” Ingo laid himself down, staring at the ceiling.

“Of what?”

“…That is the real question”

Akari didn’t wake up at all as he placed her back on the bed.

Good.

Ingo laid down next to the sleeping child, and took in a deep breath.

To be quite frank, he wasn’t really sure what assistance his younger self and his younger brother could offer him and Akari… He was honestly just expecting a rather smooth journey with the two of them keeping their heads down

But he would be lying if he said that it didn’t make him feel just a little bit better.

Help… They had *help* .

For those last few months in Hisui, it often felt like they only had each other. Uncle and Niece, family in every name but blood. Sleeping under stars, foraging and hunting and doing what was needed to survive in the highlands, even after Akari’s banishment had been rescinded.

And after all that, they still weren’t done.

They still had one more journey to make, and perhaps - at long last - they would be able to really rest.

Ingo shut his eyes, exhaling.

Help… help might be what they need to make this journey a little more bearable - a little less daunting.

He'd take it - for all it was worth.

A few days into the boat trip, Akari had decided she'd waited long enough before asking-

"I wanna have a battle!"

Ingo and Emmet both looked up from their card game with interest at the girl's announcement, Nobori giving his own interested look from the book he was reading (The cruise had a library - neat!)

"Battle?" Nobori repeated the request

She nodded "it's been forEVER since I had a battle and I wanna!" She groaned, draping herself dramatically over his lap like the child she was.

"It has not been that long" Nobori countered

"Yes it has! Not since we got here!" Akari kicked her little legs

"That is not very long" He pointed out

Akari groaned dramatically "Do you wanna battle me or not???"

"Hm… well, if we were to battle, we would have to wait until the area is completely clear." Nobori reminded "all of our pokemon are… not typical, we will draw eyes"

Akari practically jumped off of him, bouncing on her heels"Yes! I'm gonna check now!"

"Don't run!" Nobori reminded

"No!"

“ *Akari!* ”

But the child was gone.

Nobori sighed deeply, pinching the bridge of his nose with one hand.

“She has a pokemon team? Is she not… young for that?” Ingo furrowed his brow, putting down a card for the game he and Emmet were playing

“She is very small, yes!” Emmet added, picking up the card.

Ah right... Nobori hadn’t actually explained their predicament in full. Admittedly, they had been pretty patient about all that.

“... I told you that we are temporarily displaced, yes?” He started.

“Yes, you did” Emmet answered, putting down his cards.

“Well, that temporal displacement affected our ages. I am.. Not supposed to be this young, and neither is Akari. We are about… ten years off. Akari is supposed to be fifteen” Nobori attempted to explain.

Emmet thought for a moment “That… That makes a lot more sense than her being some young training savant”

“Indeed.” Ingo agreed with a nod, putting down his own cards, and asking “Is she good?”

“One of the best trainers I have ever had the privilege of battling” Nobori answered quite seriously, his book resting in his lap.

The twins looked at each other, and then back at Nobori.

“We would like to see” Ingo requested

“I am Emmet. I am verrrrry interested!” Emmet started grabbing the cards to put them away

Nobori huffed “I will have to ask Akari, but I believe she will be okay with that.”

“Thank you” Ingo took the deck of cards from Emmet.

“It’s empty!!” Akari jumped back into the room “Let’s go! Let’s go!!” She immediately pulled at Nobori’s arm “Come *on* Dad, I wanna battle!!”

“Akari, you are not strong enough to drag me anywhere, don't’ hurt yourself”

She scowled at him.

Emmet let out a laugh as he stood up from his chair along with Ingo “Let us go! I wish to see your prowess, little Akari!”

That seemed to brighten her expression considerably, and she gave Emmet a big grin

The group went to the arena, seeing that it was, in fact, empty - perhaps because of the good weather- they were out at the outdoor arena on the upper deck.

“One on one!” Akari announced as she rushed over to the other side of the arena

“No doubles?” Emmet questioned

“I do not like doubles,” Nobori reminded.

Now it was Ingo's turn to chuckle “That does not change?”

“I doubt that it ever will,” Nobori confirmed.

Akari took her place on one side of the area. Ingo had joined her, standing by the door and making sure that the door sensor notified people that a battle was commencing.

Emmet did the same on Nobori’s side - also as a precaution.

There, safe and secure - no one would see the supposedly odd

pokemon they had.

“Ready?!” Akari jumped up and down in her little overalls

“When you are, Akari,” Nobori nodded, holding up a pokeball unlike anything the twins had seen before.

He tossed it out, and his Gliscor bounced out with a happy trill

Akari seemed to think for a moment, before sending out a Samurott that startled both Ingo and Emmet with its sheer size and its surprisingly aggressive espression

“... That is a very big Samurott”

“Extremely. And scary looking”

“He’s an alpha!” Akari announced,realizing suddenly that they might not understand, adding “Alphas are reeeeally big!”

“We did not even know that he was an alpha until he evolved from dewott” Nobori huffed “It has been a surprise for everyone, we assure you”

Akari giggled “And this time ‘e’s gon’ beat g’iscor!” She announced with confidence “Ya ready Sammy??”

The Samurott roared excitedly, getting an equally excited sound from his opponent.

Emmet tilted his head, ready to watch the battle unfold with a sparkle of interest in his eyes.

Akari had started with her Samurott barrelling headfirst into the fight. Where Samurott had strength, however, Gliscor had agility and speed, dodging and catching the other pokemon off guard.

His “brother” was just as good - perhaps better- than Emmet remembered. But Akari was nothing to sneeze at either.

If he didn’t believe what Nobori said about Akari actually being a fifteen year old stuck in a five year old body, he absolutely did now - no five year old could be *this* good.

And by the looks of Ingo, he did as well.

By the end of the fight, Gliscor had come out the winner, and Akari recalled her fainted Samurott, giving the pokeball an affectionate look

“You did great, Sammy. But Dad’s jus’ - too good”

“ *Bravo* , Akari!” Nobori called out, “Once again, you fought with unprecedented skill!”

The girl grinned widely at the praise “ t’anks!”

“Bravo Indeed!” Ingo nodded “your pokemon were phenomenal to witness! I am quite impressed, miss Akari!”

“I am as well!” Emmet added.

Akari seemed to contemplate something for a moment, before suddenly pointing at Ingo in a familiar pose “I wanna battle you!!”

The younger older twin stared down at the child “...Me?”

She nods, still pointing, her expression determined “I wanna know if I can beat *you* - not just Dad”

Emmet seemed quite interested “Ooh, Ingo, will you? I am now curious about this!!”

Ingo found himself turning to his older self, whose eyes showed his own curiosity.

“...Might I?”

Nobori furrowed his brow, as if confused as to why he was asking. “Do you want to?”

Akari relaxed her pose, and rolled her eyes “Are you a *scraggy* or something??”

Ingo turned back to look at Akari, whose little hands her on her hips with a rather sly expression

“Are you insinuating something, Little miss?” Ingo questioned

“That you’re a *wimp* ! Don’t wanna get beat by me” She grinned, clearly playful.

“Oooohhh” Emmet responded “Are you going to take such an insinuation lying down, Ingo?”

Ingo seemed to take a moment, before tilting down his hat.

He then looked up at her with a determined glint in his eye

“I accept your challenge!!” he announced

Akari let out a delighted squeal to match her grin, bouncing up and down

“Singles battle! Just like with dad!”

Ingo nodded, and Nobori moved from the area off to the side.

Akari was bouncing, clearly filled with energy despite the rather intense battle they’d just had with Nobori. She clearly loved to battle and was ready to have more fun.

Ingo could only hope he’d have half as much fun, tossing out Chandelure, who trilled at being summoned, though paused as they caught sight of Nobori

“That is me, yes” Ingo pointed out to the pokemon that floated towards Nobori. “i explained to you last night”

“Hello Chandelure” Nobori greeted, clearly trying not to get at all emotional, staring up at the pokemon with a certain fondness.

“You may speak with him later, as I am certain you wish to” Ingo instructed “We have a battle to face!”

Akari grinned at that, and threw out a pokeball, her Hisuian Zoroark letting out a roar.

Emmet looked somewhat alarmed, eyes scanning the pokemon with a

bewildered expression “is that.. A Zoroark?”

“Hisuian. They’re part ghost type” Akari explained, the zoroark in question letting out a trill

“... there is a story there” Ingo commented

“Yes, but that is for another time” Nobori reminded “Commence the battle!”

Chandellure gave out another excited trill, and the zoroark returned the motion with an excited bark “Zoh!”

“Full steam ahead, Chandelure!” Ingo pointed dramatically, and the battle began

This battle felt a bit more frantic, the two of them not knowing one another’s tells and strategies, going as they battled into more complicated and staggered attacks and defenses.

Ingo only *barely* eked out a win

“Bravo to both of you!!!” Nobori clapped along with Emmet

Akari was in the middle of congratulating her Zoroark for a job well done, hugging its head with her arms barely wrapping around it. The Zoroark gave her an affectionate nuzzle in return.

“Chandelure, you were superb” Ingo rubbed the side of her face.

“Ruuure! ” She nuzzled his face.

Nobori walked over to Akari as the Zoroark was returned to her pokeball, and she let out a rather loud yawn.

She didn’t even fight when he picked her up, her head resting on his shoulder the moment she was secured in his hold, her eyes already shut.

“I believe she is in need of a nap” Nobori pointed out

She groaned in protest despite the obviousness of this fact.

Ingo chuckled “Nap time for the baby Akari, yes”

Akari hid her face in Nobori’s shoulder, but responded with a whine “I am not a baby!”

“No, but you are very small and very tired! Like a baby” Emmet pointed out

The little girl scowled into Nobori’s shirt.

“Akari, now” Nobori gave her a little pat on the back “It's 2 o'clock, a nap will be good for you. Just an hour”

“Jus’ an hour?”

“Just an hour” Nobori nodded, looking over to Ingo and Emmet “Where will you be going?”

“I will admit I'm a bit peckish. I want to grab some coffee. There’s a Staravia Roasting Co. on here” Ingo pointed out.

“Ah. Will you be lingering there?” Nobori followed up

Emmet nodded

“I will meet you there, then”

Ingo also nodded with Emmet, and they parted ways - Emmet and Ingo snagging a table in the little on-shop coffee shop.

Emmet enjoyed a white chocolate mocha, Ingo went with a cappuccino.

“So… she was verrrry impressive” Emmet started as the two sat at the four-person table “I wish to battle her next! Probably tomorrow, so that her pokemon are n peak condition!”

“She was a formidable opponent indeed. I was extremely impressed” Ingo nodded, taking a sip.

“Her pokemon are-”

“Amazing in the true sense of the word” Ingo finished Emmet’s

sentence “I concur”

“I was going to say wonderfully trained, but that is also correct!”

Ingo chuckled just a bit, feeling far more at ease in that moment then he had since the ordeal started. Things were going about as smoothly as they possibly could given the circumstances. They’d be at the port in Circhester tomorrow, and then, after another week on the boat, they’d be in Sinnoh.

Knowing that his older self was more or less the same as him in many ways, given a few obvious differences that he didn’t want to ask about, actually made him feel better. He was him, just displaced in time - as Emmet surmised.

Elesa’s theory was that he’d been cloned.

Ingo was honestly happy that wasn’t the case.

Nobori walked into the coffee shop after a few minutes of the brothers sitting together, grabbing his own coffee - cappuccino, and joining them. “I thank you for waiting for me”

“No problem!” Emmet grinned “It is nice to speak with you regardless in a much more casual setting, even if you will not tell us anything pertinent to your cause”

Ingo rolled his eyes “Time is delicate, Emmet.”

“Time is wibbly wobbly!” Emmet corrected.

“Time is both,” Nobori commented, sipping his own coffee, leaning back against his chair.

Emmet tilted his head at the sentiment, pondering.

“How do you know that?” He asked.

“I am afraid that is a “spoiler”, as Akari might say” Nobori answered, looking at his coffee cup

“Everything about you is a spoiler” Ingo pointed out, raising a brow

“I am aware” Nobori shrugged

“What *can* we ask?” Ingo requested.

“I don’t know.. You’ll have to keep asking”

Emmet snorted at his future brother’s sass

“…. Akari, you said that she is *not* our daughter” Ingo stated

That seemed to get Nobori’s attention, his eyes falling on the man.

“ - But it fooled me enough that I had an existential crisis” Ingo finished

Emmet laughed at that, and Nobori huffed.

“She tends to call me her *uncle* , usually” Nobori clarified

“And she is calling you “dad” now because…”

“It is easier for travel purposes. As is the dyeing of my hair”

“Oh, so that *wasn’t* an attempt to hide from us?” Emmet asked

“.. that was part of it, yes. This shade was unintentional” Nobori admitted

“Doesn’t look it to me” Ingo muttered, finishing off his cappuccino.

“Believe me, it surprised me as well- ”

The conversation between the three continued to be relatively light, before Emmet stepped away to grab a snack from the counter, leaving the counterparts alone

Ingo looked at Nobori, expression contemplative. Nobori stared back

“… I have one more question” Ingo leaned on his arms, rested on the table

“.. Yes?”

“... you said that you are returning to your Emmet… how long have you been away from him?”

“... Too long” Nobori admits after a moment of sincere thought “But I am returning to him, and I cannot wait to see him again”

Ingo nodded “I cannot imagine what that must feel like…”

“... And I cannot say that you will, because me and Akari being here is adjusting things… but do know that you will return to him, no matter what”

He said it with such conviction, that any worry Ingo had was dashed away with a lowering of his shoulders.

“... Good, I am glad” Ingo commented.

Nobori nodded in return, his eyes showing some sort of relief at Ingo’s response.

“Dad!”

Nobori turned his head to see Akari approaching the table, the little girl grinning as she rushed over in her little sneakers that lit up with every step

“Did you have a good nap?” Nobori asked

“Yes!” Akari jumped, “Can I go to the arcade please?”

“Again?”

“I NEED to beat Mettaton Dance Revolution!!”

“You’re too small for the foot tiles”

“I can do it!”

The two of them started rather lighthearted bickering concerning

Akari's short legs, and Emmet returned to the table

"I would like to go to the arcade! How about we all go together?" Emmet announced, overhearing the whole thing

Akari jumped at the opportunity "Really?? I'm gonna beat you at Beat Saber!"

"Emmet is very good at beat saber. Good luck" Nobori stated - beating Ingo to the punch

"I am!" Emmet grinned "And I am ready for your challenge, Little Akari!"

The two traded mischievous grins and - without consulting the other two of the group - took off towards the hall down to the Arcade.

Both Ingos just sighed in unison before following right after them

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

A stop in Circhester both answers questions and asks more

Also Emmet is coolest Uncle Ever

Circhester was… congested.

Which explained why Ingo and Akari had gotten separated from Nobori and Emmet so quickly.

At least they'd talked about this beforehand - before disembarking for the port day.

"If you are lost, return to the ship immediately" Nobori had instructed. Ingo had found it odd, being ordered around by your older self, who does not look like your older self.

Disorienting, might be the better word

But that was neither here nor there at this point. Awkwardness aside, Ingo had a passenger to safely bring to their destination - back to the ship and back to his other self.

… Yeah, no, still weird. But alas.

"Akari" He looked down at the child holding his hand, her owlish stare making him almost nervous, though he kept his voice even "It seems we have become decoupled"

'Uh huh" She pushed into his leg, clearly nervous at the crowds "I don' think my hometown's go' this much people, but I don' 'member" she muttered, her hold on his hand getting tighter as the crowd continues its moving around them

"There are a lot of people, yes. It is easy to become discombobulated. We must return to the ship then" Ingo began to look about to get his

bearings.

The child nodded against his leg.

Her nervousness was going to make walking difficult if she didn't move, Ingo realized.

Ingo cleared his throat to get her attention. "We must get going, I will need you to walk alongside me, with your hand in mine so that we do not become uncoupled."

"Uh huh" She answered

She didn't move

"... Please detach yourself from my leg so that we may continue"

"Oh.. sorry" She moved to the side just a touch, hand still holding his quite firmly.

"It is quite alright" he attempted to assure her, and looked around one last time to see if he could spot Emmet or himself.

No luck. Time to head back.

"Let's go" he gave her little hand a squeeze

And they started back towards the pier.

Akari huffed. She'd just wanted to look around, but the rush was too much, too many people. And now she couldn't find Dad- *Nobori* , she couldn't find *Nobori* .

She was getting a little too used to calling him "dad". She shouldn't think about that too hard. She focused on Ingo's hand - so very, very different, and yet so very much like his older self.

She stayed close to him as they walked through the port crowds.. Before she smelled something

It smelled like… cookies!

Her head turned, and she spotted a small stall selling yamper-shaped cookies. Her stomach grumbled at the idea of a sweet treat.

Could she ask…?

“Uh, scuse me?”

She looked up at Ingo, who was looking forward

“Es’cuse me!”

“Hm?” He looked down, his face looking almost irritated to the untrained eye. But lucky for Akari, she knew this expression with her da- with older ingo - yes. Yeah. That. Not her dad. She needed to stop thinking like that.

“Uh, can - can we - cookies?” She pointed over to the colorful stall.

Ingo looked up at the stall, then back down at the little girl squeezing his hand. He was aware that she was supposed to be a teenager, but those pleading eyes were making him question it.

He looked back up again… they were very cheap..

“.. Sure. I could certainly use the sugar”

Akari squealed in delight, pulling him over to the stall with surprising strength. Or perhaps she’d just surprised him with her enthusiasm. Either/Or

And so, he got her a freshly baked soft cookie shaped like a cartoon yamper, and got himself a light coffee. She dragged him further - hand on his coat - over to an empty bench, which she climbed onto, watching him expectantly. He sat down next to her.

“Thank you!” She grinned at him, holding the large cookie in both hands “I’ll tell dad t’pay you back f’r the cookie” she took a bite before she could correct her verbiage

“Don’t worry about it” ingo responded, holding the coffee in one hand, the other feeling for a phone he didn’t have.

Ingo watched the crowd for a moment, before looking back down at the child

Her gray-silver eyes, and with Nobori's dyed hair, they looked so very alike it was uncanny. He, honestly, did not fully believe his older self that this was not their daughter. When he first thought about it, it scared him. It was baffling and fascinating. But she was bright, she was funny, and she had the cutest smile. If she really was his daughter, it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. Perhaps Emmet was right.

Akari looked up at him when she spotted his stare and proceeded to break off a piece of the cookie "Wan'some?"

"No thank you, my coffee will certainly suffice. Though I will admit, I wish that I had not left my phone to charge on the ship."

"Me too. Dad - I mean, Ingo - Nobori? Must be worried. He always got like that b'fore"

"... Before?"

"... Yeah. Before"

Ingo tilted his head.

Before, that was a real question to all of this, huh? What had happened to them.. Before?

Perhaps, after a week and change, it was time to start prodding Nobori.

But.. not Akari. Even if she wasn't *actually* five years old, she looked it, and that was enough of a deterrent for his soft heart.

Ingo sighed deeply, taking a sip of the coffee. "Are you not worried?"

"About what?"

"Nobori"

Akari tilted her head at that ".. Why? He's strong, and he's got his team on him! He's okay. He worries a lot though " She recalled, "Do you worry a lot? Is that why y're asking?"

Ingo let out an amused huff at her reasoning "I am indeed worried that he is worried for you. I do wonder how he and Emmet are coping"

"Ehhhh i'm sure they're fine"

And they were!

Barely.

“ *How could we have- ”*

“- Easily!” Emmet interrupted “but Ingo had his hand in hers. They are still together, and we discussed that we would go back to the ship. They will meet us there”

Nobori huffed, in such a way that Emmet was very, very familiar with. Man, Nobori really *was* his time displaced brother.

“... Ingo” he called out, getting his attention “They are fine. Akari has her pokemon with her, yes?”

Nobori- Ingo nodded.

“And you are with her! Sort of!” Emmet’s smile seemed a bit lopsided “And if I know you, and I know my brother, he will ensure that she gets to our shared destination safely! He cares much for the security of our passengers. As you know”

“... You’re right. She’s fine.. Ingo, he can assure that she is safe”

“For someone that is not her dad, you certainly do worry like ours did. You even have the same nervous tic in your hand” Emmet pointed out, causing the man to flinch

“... Apologies. She and I have been through much together. This was supposed to be our way home, and now we are displaced in more ways than one.. And possibly messing up the timeline as we do so”

“Ah, I can’t imagine it’s all that bad. It seems every other month there’s a world ending catastrophe somewhere, and we all come out okay!” Emmet reasoned.

“Every time,” Ingo muttered.

“Hm?”

“Nothing. It’s… not relevant, currently”

“Will it become relevant?” Emmet questioned

“.. It might” Nobori admitted. “But regardless, let us hurry and head back to the ship”

“Huh, Alrightie then!” Emmet nodded.

Nobori and Emmet fell into step besides one another, making steady headway back to the ship through the dense crowds, eyes sharp in case they spotted Ingo or Akari in the sea of Circhester citizens.

Despite two years away from him, Nobori couldn’t help but stay quite in sync with his twin. . . even if this was not *his* Emmet - and by god did he miss his Emmet now that he remembered him. But this would have to do for now. It was more than enough.

Now if only he knew where *his kid was* - Akari. Akari. Niece. Where his niece was. Not his kid.

Sweet Reshiram, forgive him for that blunder.

Emmet and Nobori turned a corner, and were greeted by a large city square, where a stage was set up and a band seemed to be testing - Ah. This explained the crowds, didn’t it?

Emmet gasped, seeming to notice the name above the stage right as Nobori looked up at the banner

“ *PIERS???* ”

Ah. Piers. Nobori remembered that obsession.

“Emmet. Focus” Nobori lightly chided

“But - Piers! I’ve never seen him live! This is amazing!” The younger twin jumped “I might never get this opportunity again!! Can we stay for a bit??”

“ *Emmet* ”

“Pleaaaase, just one song! He’s about to start!” Emmet begged.

Nobori frowned at his brother, who was giving his best possible puppy eyes.

Ooh, it was very hard to say no to that face after so long away from him.

"... One song" Nobori relented

"YES!!" Emmet cheered, practically jumping

Nobori sighed deeply, hoping he wouldn't be regretting this.

Ah, a concert. That explained the crowds surrounding Ingo and Akari. And they were starting to get *dense*

Akari was clinging to his hand for dear life.

"Take care not to become uncoupled!" he called out over the noise - thankfully his volume helped her to hear him clearly.

"Easier said than done!" She replied as loud as she could, getting partially drowned out by the stage sound test and cheering.

He was inclined to agree with that statement.

They were getting knocked into over and over again, and Ingo heard a distressed squeal from Akari when they nearly got separated by a rowdy concert goer trying to break between them. Slightly panicked by the crowd, and understandably so, Akari grabbed at Ingo's legs and didn't let go as the crowd continued to swell, the concert close to starting. They had to get out of here in one piece, and the more they tried to move, the more concerned the two of them seemed to get at the possibility of becoming separated.

She grabbed at his shirt, tugging. He'd seen her do that before to Nobori. It was a wordless request. It seemed like the right track to take.

He didn't verbally respond - he was admittedly starting to get overwhelmed by the noise. But he picked her up, and her head went right into his shoulder - it seemed they were of the same mind concerning the noise.

"We are still on track" he stated - partially for himself but mostly for Akari.

"Mhm…" She whimpered out "i's loud…"

"I know, but we have to keep going. Once we are back on the ship, we will both get some time to rest away from all of the noise" Ingo reassured, forcing his way through the dense crowd with his free arm, the other holding her quite securely.

"Yeah…" Akari muttered, still sounding a bit distressed.

"HELLO CIRCHESTER!!!"

The crowd went wild around Ingo and Akari, with Ingo grabbing the girl a little tighter, but he recognized that voice - that was Emmet's favorite singer.

"This is a Piers concert" he muttered, mostly to himself

Which means….

"YEESS!!!!"

Oh.

He knew *that* excited yell.

"Cover your ears" Ingo instructed his little passenger.

Confused, she did as she was told, and watched him take a deep breath, before he shouted out -

“EMMET!!!”

His voice managed to pierce the crowd, and a head turned, and eyes met.

Oh thank Zekrom - he *was* here.

And beside him was Nobori, who also turned his head at Ingo’s shout.

The relief on the man’s face was palpable as Ingo started making his way to them through the screaming populous.

“Akari!” Nobori called out, with the girl lifting her head from Ingo’s shoulder with lighting speed

“Dad!” She reached, nearly causing Ingo to drop her.

But Nobori caught her, and they embraced in the tight crowd as the music started.

Emmet quickly grabbed Ingo’s arm “Look! Look, it’s PIERS!!! *I AM SEEING PIERS LIVE THIS IS THE BEST DAY EVER!!!* ”

“I can see that, Emmet” Ingo huffed, eyes falling on Nobori and Akari behind him, with the man talking to Akari and she just nodded at him, seeming to reassure him that she was okay.

Emmet gets his attention again to look at the stage, where Piers and his backup band just finished up an instrumental tune.

“ **Before I begin this next song, I wan’you all to make some noise-!** ”

The crowd erupted into cheers on command

“Hell yeah! Y’re all great!” The singer (and future gym leader - was he already one at this point?) called out to the crowd **“But I need ya’ll t’do somethin’ f’r me tonight, lend me a hand?”**

Another cheer. Nobori and Akari were watching now as well.

“Mah bes’ friend jus’ came out this weekend - and I wanna give ‘er a proper celebration! Who knows the lyrics t’ ‘We R Who We R”? I’s ‘er favorite!!”

Emmet was practically screaming directly in Ingo’s ear - and *Ingo* was supposed to be the loud one.

Akari was kicking her little legs in Nobori’s hold, looking excitedly at the stage as the instruments played the intro to the pop song.

Well…. They could stay for the song. That wouldn’t hurt. They were all reunited, right?

While it wasn’t Ingo’s preferred genre of music (And clearly not Nobori’s as well - that was oddly comforting), Emmet and Akari were clearly having a great time singing along, to the point where Akari jumped out of Nobori’s arms and danced with Emmet - the man thrilled to have a partner to sing and jam along with in the crowd

The song ended with a rambunctious cheer from the crowd, and Piers had walked off to the side of the stage, and grabbed someone’s hand.

He didn’t pull whoever it was completely to center stage, but pulled them just far enough that they could be seen by most of the crowd with the help of some target stage lights.

A young woman with a pink sweater and chestnut hair was shyly covering her face. He managed to convince her to move her hand, revealing thin glasses and spotted freckles.

Was that his best friend?

Ingo caught Nobori’s expression and recognized that stare - pleasant surprise? Did he… know her? Because Ingo certainly didn’t. He’d never even been to Galar before this.

Well, he’d ask later. Emmet had picked up Akari and the two were singing along with the next song as Piers let his friend go back behind the curtains again.

Nobori huffed “We are going to be here a while” He commented

Ingo chuckled “Yes. But we found you, that is what’s most important”

“Thank you for taking care of her, and returning her to my station” Nobori’s tone was overwhelmingly sincere

Ingo looked over at his older self, giving him a knowing look “... You are quite welcome, “Dad””

Nobori cleared his throat at the name “As I told you. It is for cover”

Sure. “Keep telling yourself that”

When the concert was over, Emmet insisted on carrying the now sleeping five year old back to the cruise ship.

“I am Emmet! I would like to hold my future niece!” Was all the reasoning he gave

Nobori couldn’t argue with that, as if he even wanted to

The streets crowds thinned considerably as they got closer to the ship (which would be departing the next morning) and the sun started to dip so low the stars were peeking out just as they approached the pier

“... Might I ask you something?” Ingo looked at his older self, who gave him a curious glance in return“A few things, actually”

“You may” Nobori nodded, seeming interested

“When Piers brought his friend on stage.. You looked as if you recognized her” Ingo pointed out, and Nobori nodded in response

“I did” He answered

“Does that mean that I know her?”

“You will. I will not say much about her, but she is a dear friend.”

Nobori clarified.

“Okay… Will I meet her soon?” Ingo questioned

“Not soon but… soon enough” Nobori answered vaguely “I do not want to give anything away”

Oh, of course.

The never-ending conundrum of interacting with your older self.

If this friendship really was important, Ingo could understand not wanting to compromise the future meeting

They returned to the ship with the sun far past setting, and by the time they had to part ways, Akari was fast asleep in Emmet’s arms, looking about as peaceful as a tuckered-out child could possibly be.

“Oh.. she is so cute. I can’t wait to meet her in the future” Emmet commented

“She will be a teenager when you meet her, ideally” Nobori reminded him, and Emmet shrugged

“Irrelevant! I am sure she will still be adorable!” Emmet grinned as he said so

Ingo snorted in amusement, hands in his pockets “it is time to turn in. I am quite exhausted”

“I must agree” Nobori nodded, turning more fully to Emmet “Let me take her back, now”

Emmet didn’t argue with him, passing over the sleeping child to Nobori, who effortlessly handled her with one arm, adjusting her to be more comfortable. “We shall see you tomorrow”

“Good night” Emmet gave a rather soft smile to him. Ingo simply nodded as if to say ‘same as him’

“Good night” Nobori nodded in return, and the brothers went their separate ways

When Emmet and Ingo returned to their state room, Ingo immediately laid down on the bed.

"... Today was fun… Even with the initial stressors" Ingo commented "And the obnoxious music"

"Piers is a genius and you know it" Emmet quipped, grabbing his pajamas from his open suitcase in the closet "And he is… very attractive in person" Emmet coughed.

"Your crush has reared its ugly head yet again" Ingo rolled his eyes

"It is not an ugly head!" Emmet argued

Ingo laughed "It's a very ugly head"

"Ugh"

The next week on the ship was long, but not at all unpleasant.

Though Akari was *desperate* for things to do after playing every game in the arcade at least once, and was breezing through all the other "age appropriate activities" on the ship from day camps to scavenger hunts

Being a teenager stuck in the body of a five year old made this … annoying, on her end - truly.

But there were *some* perks.

Being carried around like a "princess" was one of them. All the naps were nice too - even if it was getting annoying how much sleep she apparently needed as a kid. She did *not* recall needing all these naps when she was little… then again, she didn't remember her first go at being five years old very much.

Could she even remember that far back? Or was that connected to her already disjointed memories. Sure, her memory was not nearly as

fractured as Ingo's, but she had very significant gaps that kept her up at night.

One particular evening, while on the "lido" deck, she was spending a little time sitting on one of those long chairs looking out at the ocean, staring out at the colorful sky and spotting the peeking stars.

She had wanted the alone time… she was missing her mom again.

Her mom really loved the color of the setting sun. Her favorite contest dress was in those colors. She had wanted to give it to Akari to celebrate her Top Coordinator championship contest win.

It was the last thing they talked about before she woke up in Hisui. Before she had to spend almost a year of her life struggling to survive so she could come home - so she could even *remember that conversation just now.*

And even after all of that nonsense, she still wasn't home.

…She wanted to go *home*

"Akari?"

Startled out of her melancholy, she sat up quite suddenly, seeing Emmet had taken a seat on the chair next to her. …How long had he been there?

"Uh, hi" She sheepishly greeted.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" He looked out at the ocean, before looking back to her with kind eyes "But I believe you've been staring for a bit too long. You looked quite sad"

Akari tilted her head, thinking about how to respond. She sighed ".. I just wanna be home already. I's been a long time."

"Ah… I can understand that" Emmet nodded in understanding, before pointing back towards the doors leading to the ships interior "Nobori

wants me to bring you inside for dinner. The buffet has breakfast for dinner tonight -"

Akari jumped up, stopping him mid-sentence with an excited shout "-PANCAKES???"

Emmet let out a laugh "Yes!" he stood up with a particular bounce in his step "Pancakes! You are clearly a young lady of excellent taste!" Emmet then, quite effortlessly, picked her up with a rather amusing swooping motion "Off to the buffet! Ingo and Nobori both won't eat without us!"

Akari squealed when grabbed, but devolved into laughs as he carried her away and down the stairs of the foyer.

"Your father told me to mention the pancakes for dinner if you didn't wish to come inside" Emmet pointed out.

"Well, he knows I like- " she stopped her comment, thinking over what he just said before glaring at him " *hey* "

Emmet gave her a mischievous grin "Caught ya in the act!"

Akari pouted - this hadn't been the first time that week he'd tried to trick her into calling Nobori "dad" in private - this was just the first time it had worked "It was a slip up!" She argued

"Pfft, sure. A Reshiram Slip"

"A *what?* "

"It means that it is a reveal of your truth hidden behind your denial" Emmet poked her forehead "You see my future-version brother as your dad!"

The girls face was bright red before shoving it in his shoulder to hide the embarrassment "Shut uuuuuup!" she whined, kicking her legs.

Emmet just laughed "Nothing to be ashamed of! He clearly cares deeply for you as well! And I cannot wait to meet you in the future! I get to be an uncle! That's great for me! All the fun of being a parent and only minimal responsibility!"

Akari groaned again, seemingly attempting to ignore his enthusiasm "Bu- I'll be big again. Y'won' like me then"

“What on *earth* makes you think that?” Emmet pulled away a bit, to look at her face

“…. I dunno” the girl admits sheepishly with a shrug

“If anything, you being older means that Ingo and I will be able to escort you on many adventures and travels in Unova! Even more than we could at your current… stature” He cautiously worded that last part

Akari huffed, taking in his words with a contemplative expression “… Okay, but.. You gotta promise!”

“Promise? Promise what?”

“That you’ll still like me!” She clarified

Emmet tilted his head at the request, taking in the request, before his smile softened, almost amused “Okay. I am Emmet and I promise that even when I cannot effortlessly carry you like you are a little joltik, I shall still like you!”

Akari lifted her head from its resting place on his shoulder, and looked at him as if expecting a joke. She would get none, instead getting a sweet grin from the man, before they walked into the dining room of the ship, where Ingo and Nobori seemed to be in the middle of a heated debate

“Rock climbing is extremely effective as shoulder exercise”

“ *More* than simple weight exercises?”

“Far more dynamic”

“Rock climbing is hard!” Akari interrupted as they approached, with Emmet plopping her down in the chair to the left of Nobori.

“ *That* is because you kept rushing through learning with Lady Sneasler” Nobori argued without missing a beat

“But I wanted to learn!”

“Learning takes time, Akari -”

The two continued the discussion between the two of them as Emmet took a seat to Nobori's right, and Ingo's left "So, have we been assigned a number for food yet?"

The rest of the night went by pretty slowly, and before anyone knew it, Akari was fast asleep. Emmet took watch over her at the request of Ingo, who had wanted to speak in private to his older self before they went their separate ways for the night.

The older Ingo eyed his younger self, before agreeing to the conversation, taking a walk to the lido deck. While they stood, looking out at the dark water, the younger Ingo started to speak.

"We are nearing Sinnoh, and you haven't told us what it is you *need* in Sinnoh" He pointed out "I understand your reticence, but you have been quite cagey about those particular details"

Nobori let out a huff "... You are correct. I have been - with reason, but you are also correct that you need to be informed"

"Well?" Ingo crossed his arms.

Nobori mirrored the movement "... We must go to Mount Coronet… to find Palkia and Dialga."

"... the Sinnohan gods of space and time?" Ingo questioned

"The very same" Nobori nodded

"... That will return you to your … correct time and place?" Ingo questioned

"It should"

"... And if it does not?"

"I will take this up with Arceus itself, then" Nobori's frown nearly looking like a snarl at the mention of the pokemon deity.

"... Quite bold" Ingo commented

"We learn the importance of being bold. I can tell you that much" Nobori responded, eyes out on the water. It bothered Ingo that he wouldn't look at him.

"... I will admit… I am unsure how I feel about that" Ingo's expression softened

"... You will not have much of a choice" Nobori admitted

Ingo let out a frustrated huff about this.

Vague and yet not

Emmet used to be the brother with a better command of words.

"... Alright. We will help you get to Mount Coronet" Ingo concluded

"That is all I would ever ask for" Nobori nodded "Thank you"

The two fell into a strangely amicable silence for a time, watching the waves as they reflected the light of the moon on the black ocean. But the silence was interrupted by the sound of rushed steps

"I… Nobori-"

The two Ingos turned to see a slightly stressed Emmet, with Akari curled up in his arms, her head in her hands, her shoulders caved in.

Nobori seems to immediately know what's going on, and says nothing, only striding over to meet Emmet, arms reaching out and taking Akari in his arms, feeling her shaking. "Akari, look at me" he muttered to her, glancing up at the twins. Ingo seemed to understand the look, and gently pushed Emmet towards the door.

"I saw him," she whimpered. "I saw him. He was *here"*

"He is not here" he assured "He cannot be here. There is no way he can be here"

"But I saw him-!" she sobbed "He was -he was laughin at me!!"

"Akari, he is not here. We are far away from Volo. He cannot find us."

“But-... I just..”

Her head turned into his light jacket, little fists twisting the fabric.

“... Okay.. we will go check together”

That seemed to be enough for her, and she shoved her head into his shoulder yet again.

As Nobori walked back towards the lower decks, Ingo and Emmet looked on from their relatively obvious hiding place, and shared a look between the two of them - mostly of concern

“... Should we ask who this “Volo” is?” Emmet asked

“... That feels unwise” his twin responded.

Emmet bit the inside of his cheek at that answer. Ingo was right… but that curiosity was still there, nagging.

Perhaps they could ask about it later -

For now, Sinnoh was just around the corner

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

In which relationships develop- and complaints are made!

Akari looked quite embarrassed the next time that Emmet and Ingo saw her - pointedly not making eye contact with either of the brothers as Nobori attempted to keep up the conversation.

The poor thing - she was probably not feeling too keen after crying on Emmet's shoulder due to her nightmare. But thankfully, Emmet took the initiative - Ingo seeing the spark of an idea in his brother's eyes.

"We are only two days out from Sinnoh!" He announced with a bounce in his chair "I am quite excited! I have never been to Sinnoh!"

That seemed to catch the girl's attention. "Never?"

"Ever! Can you tell me about it? You're from here, aren't you?" The man asked, giving Nobori a wink

That seemed to be enough to keep her distracted - getting into details about what her home region was like despite the hiccups in her speech from being five. It was enough that she lost most of that awkwardness within an hour or so. Both Ingos were grateful.

By the time they reached the port in Canalave City, Akari was more-or-less back to being bubbly and adorable, and seemed more than ready to bundle up for the cold of mount coronet, going into detail about the route they would have to take

"There's not a lotta int-int.. Between city transit, so we're gonna have to walk and camp!" Akari explained the day before port "I 'member, I did it lots on my journey wit' my friends!"

"Aha, so you did a pokemon Journey" Nobori pointed out.

"... I did!" Akari seemed to just realize - the memory flooding her all

at once ”I started alone, but I met friends ‘long the way…”

“Do you remember those friends' names?” Ingo asked, eyes towards the horizon from their little balcony

“Hmmmmmmm” Akari extended the thoughtful hum “I think… one of them… hm…”

“Don’t force it” Nobori gently reminded “It will come to you”

She pouted “But I remembered they were there! Why can’t I remember their names?”

“Perhaps you haven’t heard the right trigger” Ingo suggested “That seems to be how your memories have been coming and going so far”

“That does add up!” Emmet nodded in agreement “You will remember, no problem!”

Akari seemed… doubtful, but sighed “Sinnoh’s bigges' city is Jubilife, which we’re gonna have to go through on our way there” She explained “its… if I remember right, its reeeeally different from what we saw in Hisui”

“I can imagine” Nobori contemplated “after that, it's… three days? Four? To mount coronet” He thought aloud

“I’s prob’ly quicker now” Akari reasoned.

“And safer” Nobori agreed

“...Safer?” Ingo questioned.

There was a pause, and Nobori and Akari shared a look before they looked back at the twins

“Hisui was.. Dangerous” Akari answered “Really bad”

“Yes. One had to travel carefully” Nobori added “Now, let us look back at the map-”

Emmet and Ingo could see that they didn't feel like talking about that - at least not right now. Perhaps they could prod later.

They had a lot of "laters", they both realized.

Disembarking the boat was pretty simple for Nobori and Akari - they only had their backpacks with them, and left the boat with no issue at the Canalave port.

Ingo and Emmet had a bit of a longer go at it, taking their carry-ons and finding a storage place to put them - they'd be too cumbersome for the journey ahead. They had - admittedly - not traveled in such a way in quite some time.

"Our journey days are quite behind us" Ingo admitted, packing the backpack that he'd just purchased from a nearby poke-mart.

"Verrrrry behind us" Emmet added, being the brother to pack the camping gear.

"Y'r not that old!" Akar pouted at him.

"It feels like along ago" Ingo nodded, almost sagely "We are definitely old"

Emmet chuckled "Alas! So very long ago!! Ages, even!"

The girl just rolled her eyes "Le's gooooo!!!" she whined, kicking her feet on the bench they were packing at, just off the main road.

"Yes, yes, we must begin making headway!" Nobori called out, having gotten his and Akari's things all set up and ready to go "On your feet! Full steam ahead to Mount Coronet!"

Weather was on their side for the first day. The sun was high, and the path from Canalave to Jubilife city was clear and rather sparse of

people, which was rather odd, even to Akari.

“Hm… not lotsa travelers” Akari thought out loud, charging ahead with a speed walk, and making a show of looking ahead on the trail. “Wonder why…”

“Oh? Are there usually more people?” Ingo asked, adjusting his backpack for what must have been the fourth time.

“Think so…” Akari contemplated “What day is it?”

“It is summer here! July 13th!” Emmet checked his Xtrans, announcing the date

“... Oooooh!!” Akari seemed to just realize something, bouncing in her boots “i’s gon’ be Union Day! Tha’s why no ones goin’ anywhere!”

“Union day?” Nobori questioned.

“I’s a day celebrating the creation of Sinnoh as a country” She explained, walking backwards to face them “When all the clans joined together!”

“There is a day to celebrate that?” Emmet asked “Like Unovan Independence Day?”

“I suppose so, though I imagine they’re different holidays in purpose and celebration… and history.” Nobori thought. “I wonder when that occurred. There was no sign of that kind of joining together when we were in Hisui”

“Hmmmm I don’remember” Akari admitted “Maybe i’ll ‘member when we get t’jubilife”

“Or the answer will be there, regardless” Ingo suggested

“Perhaps! For tourists!” Emmet agreed.

Akari just nodded in response, eyes falling forward again as they continued their walk - seeming more determined than before.

Despite her initial energy, about three hours in, she was back in Nobori's arms, tired and cranky that she was being carried yet again

"Rest, Akari. Take a nap. We will keep going" Nobori encouraged

"Ughhhh" She whined "I wanna keep wa-lking!!"

"You are not awake enough to walk" Nobori pointed out, readjusting her in his hold.

Akari just whined again, getting a laugh out of Emmet "It is okay to be tired! You are a growing child!" He pointed out

"Ughhhh I cannot wait t'be big again!"

"Soon, Akari. Soon" Nobori reminded "But please, do just rest"

With a final, heaving sigh, the girl gave up, resting her head down on Nobori's shoulder, as Jubilife City came up in the distance

Nobori could not recognize a damned thing in this city.

Jubilife became.. *this* ? This bustling place? Loud and like a miniature Nimbasa City?

Akari was up and awake by the time they got into the city limits, and was actively pulling at Ingo (who had started to lag behind) and talking as her memories came to her, excitedly bouncing.

"And that- that place has really good noodles! Now that I was in Hisui I know that they were Pearl-Clan inspired! It's sooo nice on a cold

day!”

“Pearl Clan?” Ingo repeated.

“Explain later!” She responded vaguely, eyes falling on a stall, gasping “Bubba waffles!!”

“Akari, we just has breakfast” Nobori scolded

“But - but bubba waffles!!! Wit’ fruit and whipped cream!!” She pointed, pulling on Ingo rather aggressively

“If we share it, she won’t be hopped up on sugar!” Emmet suggested

“Don’t encourage her” Nobori scolded.

“But Da-addy! Ple------ease?” she let go of Ingo’s hand, the man opening and closing his fist as if to test it for pain, and grabbed at Nobori’s coat “I haven’ad a bubba waffle in so long!! Pleaaaase????”

Oh, she was pleading with the big, adorable eyes of hers.

Nobori sighed deeply, looking up.

He was going to cave, wasn’t he?

“... P’ease?”

“... One, and we all share”

Akari cheered, jumping up and down “yes! Yes! Thank you! Thank you daddy! Let’s go!”

Nobori sighed deeply as he let himself get pulled in the direction of the stand.

“You are quite weak to her when she calls you Dad” Ingo commented

“I am you in the future. Be wise with your snark” Nobori chidded, continuing to get pulled along.

Emmet snorted out a laugh “Hah! You will somehow get softer with

age, Ingo" he teased.

"Shut up, I want bubba waffles!" Akari interrupted

"Akari! That attitude does not deserve bubble waffles!" Nobori scolded.

… and yet she got the bubble waffles.

They decided to start the more heavy travel the next day, setting up in a hotel after Akari ended up dragging them all around in a rather interesting but exhaustive tour of the city.

"Can I use the pool?" Akari asked after they'd gotten settled in their room.

"You do not have a bathing suit, Akari" Nobori pointed out

"Aw…" Akari pouted "What about the arcade?"

"We need to eat dinner first," Nobori responded, getting a groan from the child.

"No fun!"

"We are not here for fun" He argued "Do you need to do something? Are you restless?"

"Hmmm I guess" She admitted "Can we battle after dinner?"

"Unfortunately, it is too late - the facilities are all closed. You will have to do something else to get your energy out. Perhaps we can go for a walk after we eat"

The child grumbled and groaned "Ugh.. fine, I guess"

Nobori sighed “How are you not tired?”

“Uncle Emmet carried me a lot”

Nobori paused, “... Uncle?”

“He asked me to call him that” she awkwardly shrugged, and Nobori couldn’t hold back a slightly incredulous chuckle.

“Of course, that sounds like him”

Akari thought for a moment, before turning on the mattress to lay on her stomach rather than her back. “... Hey uh… What’s *your* Emmet like? Is he *just* like him? Or different?”

Nobori paused… “They are very similar, yes but… time has a way to taking your energy and focusing it”

“Really? Wha’s’that mean?”

He didn’t answer at first, before sitting on the bed.

“.. Well. having such an intensive job focused him, made him more.. Direct, than ever before. It brought him much joy.” he tried to answer. Once he was starting to talk about him Nobori- Ingo - found that he couldn’t stop. His memories of his version of his brother - a little older, a little wiser, a little more sly and cunning - and a brilliant person full of enthusiasm and love.

“... He only gets better as he gets older, which I think is indicative of how good he is at his core.” He finishes “I greatly looked up to - and still look up to him, despite being the older brother”

Akari - who moved to sit next to him as he’d gone on, put her hands on his as his gaze looked slightly forlorn.

“I think he sounds really cool!” She commented, looking a little awkward “And I wanna meet him, when we get back. I mean, I know I already met’im, but -”

“I know, Akari. I know what you mean” He assured her, “Thank you for asking me about him. It felt.. Good to talk about him.” he confirmed “Now, are you hungry?”

Akari nodded, bouncing off the bed “I wanna get s’ghetti”

“S’ghetti?”

“... you know what i me-ean!”

She couldn’t sleep.

Ugh… she couldn’t *sleep*

Sitting up in bed, she looked over to Ingo/Nobori/Dad. He was fast asleep, thank goodness. Akari rubbed her face, wondering what she could do to fall asleep. She wasn’t going to wake Ingo up, this wasn’t important enough. She quietly hummed, and took out one of her pokeballs

“Shhh” she shushed the pokeball she was holding before unclasping it, and opening it up.

Her Zoroark popped out, and tilted its’ head down at her

“Shh, I wanna go for a walk cause i can’t sleep”

“Rr ?”

“Can ya uh, look like an adult so we can go walk?” Akari requested.

The Zoroark tilted its head, thinking, but then gave a nod before fading off, taking on the appearance of -

Akari seemed a tad bewildered at the choice. “Ah. okay then?”

The facsimile of Emmet gave her a slightly-too-wide grin.

“.. Better than nothin” She slid off of the bed “Just a quick walk!” She grabbed the key card for the room, and reached, grabbing her pokemon’s hand.

“Emmet” nodded to her, and let itself get dragged to the door

Just a walk around the block seemed to be exactly what she needed - all that extra energy leaving as they turned left back onto the hotel’s street. It had only been about 15 minutes, but she was already rubbing her eyes.

As Akari let out a yawn, “Emmet” tilted its head

“Hm? Oh!” The fake Emmet reached down to her, picking her up as they entered the hotel lobby

“You coulda asked,” Akari grumbled, too tired to argue. The illusion simply nuzzled her head.

As “Emmet” got her up to their floor, they walked, turned a corner and

“Mmrrp!”

Akari turned her head, and was met with the Real Emmet, staring with wide eyes, a small bucket of ice in his hands

“S’not you” Akari mutter “m’zoh-ark”

“... ah. I am Emmet. I am…. Flattered?”

The Fake Emmet just smiled, and promptly walked around the real Emmet. Who watched as they disappeared back into their hotel room (How did a Zoroark know how to use a room key?)

“... Ingo was correct. Therapy will be needed” He told himself as he returned to his own hotel room.

They got up and going relatively early the next day, with Akari eager and ready to start heading over to the mountain.

“The sooner the better!! I wanna be tall!”

“And older? Or just taller? Do you want to be a verrrrry-tall five year old?” Emmet jokingly asked.

“What??? No!!”

As the journey went on, Akari’s attention bounced between the twins and Nobori, with her first bout of tiredness coming about 3 hours into their hike

“Hm, break time?” Ingo suggested?

“I could go for a good snack break!” Emmet agreed.

Nobori nodded “I agree”

“Oooh, can I have the crackers??”

The group took a break on the side of the road, eating snacks and Akari eventually falling asleep on Nobori’s lab, the little girl snoring.

“Children really do just run around, scream, and sleep” Ingo commented

“That is your fake future daughter, Ingo. Be wise with your words” Emmet warned playfully.

Nobori rolled his eyes “I promise she continues to be quite energetic as a teenager, she doesn’t sleep as much…. Though perhaps she

should have, and should when she is back to her regular age."

"Teenagers *do* need a lot of sleep" Emmet reasoned.

"They do?" Ingo questioned

"Yyyup! I read it in my news emails I get in the morning!"

Conversation flowed quietly until the three of them had finished their light snacks, and Nobori got up, carrying Akari rather effortlessly in one arm.

"We can keep going. She will sleep a little longer, I imagine"

"Are you sure?" Ingo questioned

"She will be happy we've made progress," Nobori assured.

"Allllrightie! Off we go!"

The journey was rather pleasant with the weather never getting worse than "cloudy" as they made their way - Oreburg was already in view as high noon came about. They made it near Oreburgh just as the sun began to set

"Shall we try to make it to the city?"

"Nonsense. We will camp here. We'll get there too late for accommodation" Nobori chidded "Get your tents set up before the sun sets. Akari?"

"Huh?"

"Get the fire started"

Akari gave him an affirmative nod.

"Is that safe?" Ingo asks

"Focus on your tent" Nobori flatly states "Akari has lit dozens of fires. She knows what to do"

"I got it!" She encouraged "I'll ask if I need help!"

The twins shared a look, but let it go. They had to get their tent up anyway.

By the time Nobori was done with Akari and his camp setup, Akari had the fire going, and was attempting to figure out what she wanted to eat for dinner. Ingo and Emmet were only just getting their tent up

“I forgot how verrrrrry difficult this is!” Emmet lightly whined.

“Wha? Why is it hard?” Akari requested.

“They haven’t camped in a while” Nobori pointed out “Do you need any help?”

“We have it handled!” Ingo responded, “Almost done! What are we doing for food?”

Akari called back “I think we should have the soup cubes!!”

“Ooh, I haven’t had those in years!” Emmet called out “I’m game!”

“It has been a very long time, yes,” Ingo agreed. “Let’s hurry with the sleeping bags, Emmet”

“Yes, yes!”

Nobori and Akari shared their own amused look, and Nobori joined Akari by the fire, helping her with the sparse camping supplies they’d purchased in Jubilife. Just a collapsible “pot”, and 4 spoons with 4 small bowls.

As the brothers finished up their own tent, Emmet grumbled a bit about how much he hated sleeping on the ground, and while Ingo agreed, he could tell that Akari and Ingo weren’t going to be complaining about it. In fact, the two seemed right at home as they sat in front of the fire, watching the pot of soup start to simmer. Akari was in his lap, snacking on a bag of jerky, while Nobori took a comb through her hair, which had gotten quite messy through the day.

“You two are quite comfy already” Ingo commented.

“We are quite used to camping” Nobori responded

“Yeah! Did it a lot - I love camping!” Akari added, “Wan’ some jerky?”

“Ah, no thank you. I prefer dried fruit” Ingo reached into his own bag as he approached the fire.

The little girl giggled “So you have a sweet tooth too?”

“I doubt ten years would change that, Akari” Nobori commented

Emmet sat himself down in front of the fire “Do we have anything to drink that isn’t water?” He asked, “I need flavor!”

“Akari and I only have water” Nobori answered “You can get flavor from food” he added, Akari laughing a bit at the comment

“Why d’you need juice? I don’t need juice” The girl commented.

“You didn’t *have* juice” Nobori commented “Juice was a luxury where we were”

Emmet and ingo shared a look , then glanced back at Nobori and Akari

“Speaking of…” ingo started

“We would like to ask *where* you were. We know that you were displaced, but you have not told us very much about it” Emmet finished.

Despite his face’s neutrality, Emmet could tell that he had pressed his “brother”’s buttons.

Akari seemed to put more thought into it, and looked up at Nobori “I think we should tell ‘em”

“Really?”

Akari nodded “I mean, i’s not like the timeline’ll get *worse* , and you an’ I are still here so like, I don’t think it’ll change anythin”

The man tilted his head as he thought “... I suppose not, no”

“Do you wanna start then? Y’were there longer than me” Akari encouraged, her little arms over his own, that were wrapped around her midsection as she leaned back against his chest, the weight of her grounding him as he thought about those years he would have to tell

both himself and his brother.

"... Yes, I will start" Ingo agreed, looking back up at the brothers

He was grateful for their patient expressions, and began to tell his tale

"When I awoke in Hisui for the first time, I remembered nothing but my name…"

"And, after that, I as'ed him to send us home" Akari concluded "an' we ended up here"

Nobori almost wanted to laugh at Ingo's face in particular.

".... So… You were back in time for two years.." Emmet pointed to Nobori "and you were there for a year" he then pointed to Akari. The two nodded at him "Oh sweet Zekrom give me strength"

"Add Reshiram to that" Ingo huffed. "This is a lot to take in"

Akari just kind of shrugged, and let out a yawn.

"... I will leave you to think. Any questions you have tomorrow, I will answer.. But for now, it is time for sleep"

The twins didn't seem all that pleased at such a response, but they both nodded.

"Mmh, g'night" Akari gave them a wave, before Nobori gathered her up in his arms, and the two were zipped into their tent

“... Ingo?”

“... I forget you” Ingo thinks, voice quiet “I forget you for two years. We are separated- “

“- But we are clearly reunited” Emmet reminded, grabbing his brother’s shoulder “.. I won’t pretend this is not scary. It is. But I am certain that I am waiting for you… besides”

“... Now that we know, perhaps things will change.. But..”

“But..?”

“If we have changed the future.. Does that mean that she is alone for all of that?”

Emmet paused at that question, letting the subtext sink in.

Ingo continued “What they both went through was… awful. But it was less awful because they had each other for at least some of it”

“... That is true” Emmet acknowledged.

They fell into silence after that, and decided in that quiet to turn in, though the two of them probably weren't sleeping very much that night.

Ughhhhh why were they up at *dawn* ?????

“That used t’be my nickname!” Akari seemed to recall in the moment, grinning.

Ingo, though half awake, managed the question: “Why’d you stop using it?”

The child paused, genuinely seeming to have to think on it "... I dunno. Maybe I still do?" She admitted "But.. It doesn't feel right - not right now"

"Perhaps it will feel more correct when you are bigger?" Emmet suggested, before yawning.

"Maybe" she shrugged "Now come on - wake up!"

"Ughhhh can't we eat firrrst?" Emmet whined, but was still rolling up his sleeping bag.

"Waste! Once we're done packing, we eat, then pack the food stuff! Means it's the first thing we unpack later!" Akari answered

"That is correct! Now hurry up. I want to make it to the base of the mountain before high noon" Nobori instructed.

"High noon?" Ingo tilted his head

"Different from time noon" Akari answered. Though that didn't help the man much.

The twins sighed rather dramatically in unison, and Akari decided that - at that moment- she'd pull out the load-bearing pin of their tent, and it deflated on top of them.

"Come on! Up up up!" She giggled

"You little aipom!!"

All he got in return was a giggle and an impish grin.

Perhaps Nobori was used to hiking in a way that his younger self

would never be (at least, not *now*) but Ingo and Emmet kept sighing in exasperation as they walked through the wilderness, which only became more and more familiar as they got closer to the mountain.

“Ugh, you guys are so lame!” Akari teased “I’m not tired yet!”

“You woke up from a nap 20 minutes ago!” Emmet argued “That doesn’t count!”

“Well D-” she cleared her throat “ *He* Isn’t tired!” She pointed to Nobori

“Do not compare me to my past self, that is unfair” Nobori lightly scolded

“You’re older!”

“Only mentally, currently”

Akari just rolled her eyes, looking ahead at the trail entrance for Mount Coronet

“Huh?”

There was a pokemon ranger standing in front of the trail entrance, with a sign in all capital letters

“ENTRANCE CLOSED- USE NORTH TRAIL”

“What?” Ingo questioned.

“Why is it closed?” Akari wondered aloud, coming closer to the pokemon ranger.

“Pardon me!” Nobori called out, getting the woman’s attention.

The girl turned, her blue and green hair up in a high ponytail “Oh, Hello! Sorry, there’s a feral pokemon on this trail that’s been attacking people. The Rangers are on it, but it's much safer if you go to the northern trail towards Snowpoint!”

Akari frowned “A Feral pokemon?”

“Yes, little one! It's very dangerous!” The woman leaned over to look at Akari "It's a wild sneasel - we think”

Ingo furrowed his brow “... You think?”

“We aren’t sure” She admitted “Someone claimed it's like a giant sneasel”

Nobori and Akari shared a knowing, slightly surprised look “Are you sure it is not a Sneasler?”

The ranger gave Nobori a slightly befuddled look “What? A sneasler? There hasn’t been a wild sneasler in this area in…” She seemed to think “.. but we can’t rule it out” she muttered.

“Uh, Miss?”

“Oh, sorry! Sorry, distracted” The woman looks a bit sheepish “But, there hasn’t been a sneasler sighting in over 50 years. We thought perhaps they’d gone extinct.”

Akari gasped “Extinct?? But - how??”

The ranger looked a bit confused at the child, but answered “There was a disease brought by outside johtoian sneasels. It seemed to only affect the evolution, and without the evolution, Sinnohan sneasels eventually began to die out once they evolved.”

Nobori looked like he was attempting to suppress a *very* upset expression (for him, at least).

Emmet saw that this was going nowhere - and intervened.

“Thank you for your assistance, ranger!” Emmet stated “We shall start headed north then, yes?”

The way he said “yes” seemed to snap Nobori out of his expression, and he nodded “ Yes… It is wise to start, let’s go”

“Thank you again!”

“Uh.. sure, bye” she waves, eyes scanning over the odd group of triplets and the daughter of one of them, she assumed (??)

Her eyes’ didn’t spot a surprisingly familiar warden bracelet until it

was too late, and new hikers had to be diverted.

It took some time before anyone spoke again.

“…. I think we should go t’ Snowpoint firs’” Akari announced from her place on Emmet’s shoulders

“And why is that?” Ingo asked.

“… Cause I think m’boot is broken” She admitted, kicking her little foot.

“What?” Nobori approached, and as Akari lifted her little boot, he could see the worn out sole starting to come off the heel, and huffed “How cheap. I suppose we will have to make a pit stop. We cannot afford for anyone to not be prepared for whatever may come on the mountain”

Ingo sighed “To the north it is”

Emmet gave an enthusiastic grin “Let's get going then! To Snowpoint!”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

:3 <

Snowpoint was…. Cold.

Yeah. Snowpoint was cold. That was Emmet's perception of the small "city" in the northernmost part of Sinnoh. How a metropolitan city of any kind could grow and thrive here, he could not tell you.

It was cute though! But way too cold.

"Ah… so this is what happened to the settlement. I would have never thought of this…" Nobori commented quietly.

"It's so different" Akari added, head tilted up at the modern buildings covered in show and various decorations "But it's nice! I think they'd like it!"

"How is it nice??? It is cold!" Emmet added

"You have already said that" Ingo commented

"Three times!" Akari added, kicking her little feet as Nobori carried her - if only to make sure her feet didn't get cold until they got her better boots. "Jus' cause it's cold doesn't mean its not pretty!"

"It is not any less true!" Emmet argued, comically shivering and holding his own arms "Can we find a hotel, please?"

"We must buy Akari new boots first" Nobori pressed "and perhaps a new coat - this coat has little wind resistance, so she says"

"Hm… To be frank, the both of you should probably get some new clothes" Ingo commented "Your coat does not look very warm either"

"I am quite used to the cold, actually" Nobori pointed out "I lived out in the wilderness, remember? It was usually cold"

“... I do not like that” Ingo grimaced

Akari giggled at the adult banter, eyes falling down the road as it continued, and she decided to keep on looking around.

Snowpoint City was a quaint type of place, with a rather relaxed and sweet atmosphere that felt eternally holiday-like. There was a warmth to it, a coziness despite the city atmosphere and the almost eternal chill of being this far north. It reminded her of weeks spent in the pearl clan settlement, when the only warmth was pokemon furs and fires and snuggling up with Irida or whoever wanted a buddy to keep warm with.

It was strange that a modern city reminded her of a settlement that didn't even have any electricity, but the mind wanders when there’s nothing else going on in the present moment (and you were kinda tired from all the travel, but Akari wasn’t about to fall asleep just yet.)

Popping into a clothing and outdoor activity store, they quickly found some child-sized boots for the girl - they had little snorunts on the back of the heels in a soft blue. She seemed to really like them - they were so cute!

“Do they fit well? Not too big?” Nobori asked

Akari bounced up and down, taking a few over-exaggerated steps - almost looking like a waddling snorunt herself “Yup!! They’re not slidin!!”

“Excellent!” Emmet grinned. “And they look very cute!”

Akari grinned at the compliment.

“Shall we also get her a new hat?” Ingo suggested

“New hat????” Akari bounced up and down, practically jumping in excitement at the prospect “Can I get one?? Can I ??”

“That sounds like a good idea” Nobori started checking what money had had “I’ll have to see if I have the funds - “

“Don’t worry about that!” Emmet interjected, holding up his own

wallet “Our treat!”

Akari gasped excitedly “Really??”

“Are you sure?” Nobori questioned

“Of course” Ingo answered on behalf of Emmet, the both of them nodding “You are, essentially, our brother, sort of. Think nothing of it”

Nobori paused that that, but his attention was taken elsewhere when he saw that -

“ *Akari!* No, you cannot climb on the table!!”

Ingo and Emmet watched with amusement as Nobori grabbed Akari off of the table under her arms like he was grabbing a meowth, arguing with her about how she was not allowed to do that just to get the piplup hat while also letting her grab the piplup hat.

They walked out of the store with the piplup hat.

The hotel they found to stay in was called the Glaceon Pearl Inn (ha.). It looked rather quaint and homey for something in the middle of the city. As they walked into the lobby, Akari stared, starting to look around like she was looking for something

“Akari?” Nobori got her attention, almost startling her

“Oh! Uh..... I think my mom an’ I stayed here, once” She recalled, continuing to look around “I was bigger - uh, I mean, older. It was f’r my birthday…”

Emmet hummed, seeming to notice a shift in her tone as he gently

asked. “Is that so? Did you like it?”

“Uh huh… I loved it a lot.”

Her low mood was rather sudden, Emmet glancing over at Nobori, who had already taken note of it.

Nobori reached down, picking up the girl, whose head rested right against his shoulder almost immediately, looking… oddly defeated, doing little more than sighing.

Emmet was about to ask, before Ingo called out front he front desk-

“Our rooms are ready!”

Letting out a slightly frustrated huff, Emmet glanced at Nobori and Akari, before approaching Ingo for his copy of their room keys- he was going to have to ask about Akari’s reaction later.

Akari’s melancholy hadn’t left her for the rest of the evening, and she hadn’t been like this since they’d been back in Hisui.

Nothing seemed to perk her up. Not food, not the promise of a battle (which she turned down), and not even getting to put on some fuzzy pajamas to stay warm that night.

Nobori -Ingo, he could go by Ingo now - took some time in the en-suite to think about how to address her down-turned mood.

But those thoughts were pushed to the wayside when he left the bathroom - finished dressing and drying his hair, and the first thing he heard was a struggling little sniffle.

Her beloved Samurott was out of his pokeball, and had rested his

large head very carefully in the tiny girl's lap, crooning softly in concern.

"... Akari?"

She seemed startled at his speaking, wiping at her misty eyes "N-nothin'"

"... I didn't ask if anything was wrong" He cautiously responded, walking to the bedside, taking up the empty space next to her, and glancing at Samurott's concerned expression before looking back at her. "Please, Akari. Tell me why you have been so upset today. I have not seen you like this in.. quite some time"

The little girl's wide eyes were heartbreaking to look at, as she took a moment to think before admitting:

"I …. I miss my mom.. I …" her face crumpled "I wan' - *I wan' my mom-my-y* " She started to cry but clearly, desperately didn't want to, her hands rubbing at her eyes, but once she started crying she couldn't stop.

She didn't want to cry - she didn't want to cry!! She wasn't *actually** a child! She's just stuck like this!

But that didn't change the fact that since that trigger, memories of her mother had been flooding her mind all evening, triggered more and more as they went to new places in the hotel, and that ache in her chest became overwhelming. She thought she could handle it - she handled a similar ache in Hisui - but a little body with big feelings was a terrible combination.

She felt her Samurott lift his head off of her lap, and before she could protest the removal of that small comfort, she found herself being picked up and hugged against the man she's been calling "dad" for the better part of two weeks.

She heard him quietly tell her that it was okay. That they were well on their way to returning home. That no matter what, he was returning her to her mother. All of the things adults usually said to children to get them to start crying

But he was different from other adults, wasn't he? He *meant* it. He always meant it. Because he was Ingo. He was "Nobori"... He was *dad*.

She grabbed at him, her cries eventually petering out into whimpers after quite a few minutes.

When she became more aware of her surroundings again, Ingo had moved so he was leaning back against the headrest of the hotel bed. His thumb brushed away the remainder of her tears as she tried to even out her breaths.

"How do you feel now?" he asked carefully

".. 'm fine…"

"That is not what I asked, Akari" he prodded.

".. I feel better" she clarified "Sorry…"

"No need for sorry, Akari. As I am allowed to miss Emmet, you are allowed to miss your mother"

The girl just exhaled a huff in response.

Ingo contemplated "... Could you tell me about her?"

"Huh?"

"Your mother, Akari. Could you tell me about her? As I told you of Emmet?"

The girl thought for a moment, before coughing as if to clear her throat - though it was probably to even her raw voice a bit ".. Her name's Johanna."

"Hm… Johanna Fletcher does sound better than Akari Fletcher, hm?"

Akari managed a light giggle at the comment "I still t'ink Shou's better"

“That isn’t even real” Ingo argued, getting an eyeroll from the girl “Now.. Johanna?”

Akari sighed, feeling tired out, but willing to talk. “Yeah… She’s… she’s the bes’ mom ever”

“If she raised you, I don’t doubt it”

Akari laughed a little shyly “She wassa coorbin-cordin, coor-din-ay-tor” She took a moment to find that word.

“A coordinator? What is that?”

Akari tried her best as a tired five-year- old to explain what a coordinator was, and Ingo listened, nodding along encouragingly as she started to drift off practically mid-sentence.

She didn’t need to know he already knew what a coordinator was, or that he’d heard of Johanna Fletcher before - she was a famous coordinator, after all. It distracted the girl, wore her out. The way she talked about her mother was like the women single-handedly put the stars in the sky just for her.

Akari loved her mother. Akari *missed* her mother.

And some part of Ingo was burning with shame at even pretending to be a parent comparable to Johanna Fletcher.

He hadn’t been making any sort of joke before. Anyone who could raise a child as kind and intelligent as the little girl sleeping in his arms must be someone remarkable.

He took a deep breath. He would get her back to her mother.

And perhaps, he would get to thank her for raising such a wonderful little girl.

Akari was excited to finally get on Mount Coronet in the morning -

wanting to leave behind her “embarrassing meltdown” last night (*she wouldn’t hear it when Ingo told her she didn’t need to apologize. Of course she did! Right?*)

Boots were on and clasped securely with velcro, the new thick coat and her oversized galaxy team scarf were firmly wrapped around her, and her brand new Piplup hat was securely on her head.

But her eagerness to finally get going to Mount Coronet ground to a halt when -

“A *leesh?????*”

The little girl looked practically beside herself, but Nobori stood firm as he clicked the little plastic buckle of the eevee backpack around her chest - it was just big enough that it fit snugly around her jacket.

“You have a very bad tendency to run off” he argued. “Your climbing on the table at the store, as well as rushing off at the breakfast buffet only to get lost in the crowd is more than enough to convince me that this precaution is needed”

“But - But I do *not* !” She stomped her foot at the sheer indignity

“Need I remind you that I learned about you and your Zoroark taking an unsupervised midnight walk when we were in Jubilife? While I was *asleep*?”

“I left a note!” She argued

“Emmet had to tell me what you did. I am not letting you out of the leash. The clasp is on the back and you *will* be restrained if I feel it necessary”

“AUUUUGHHHH ”

But alas, Nobori was not swayed - giving her a glare anytime she attempted to fiddle with the front clasp with her mittens.

At least he was carrying her right now, so no leash was needed… for now.

“Hah! You used the leash!” Emmet laughed as they met up just after checking out of the hotel - the man’s grin showing clear amusement at the girl’s pouty expression

“Your suggestion was noted, appreciated, and acted upon, Emmet” Nobori responded with a grateful nod

Akari gasped, turning her head to Emmet with betrayal in her eyes “Traitor!!”

“I am no traitor, Little Miss!” Emmet didn’t seem to take the anger seriously, he just grinned

“No! Traitor! Ingo’s my favorite uncle now!” Akari declared with a little kick of her legs

Ingo looked up from his phone, eyes wide “Excuse me?”

“He’s basically your dad but in the past! He can’t be your uncle!” Emmet argued

“No! New favorite Uncle!” Akari declared

“What on earth did I miss while checking my messages?” Ingo furrowed his brow, looking between Akari’s angry expression, and Emmet’s slightly baffled one - seems he wasn’t pleased with getting demoted

Nobori sighed “Lets grab some food for the road before this devolves into further arguing, hm?”

Ingo agreed, seeing Akari pause at the mention of food. “Let’s”

The in-house restaurant at the hotel had a rather hearty breakfast buffet for its guests, and Akari had quite a lot of eggs and bacon, having to be convinced to eat some toast for the sake of balancing out the meal. Their stop at the market, however yielded several shelf-stable snacks including mamoswine jerky, which Nobori recalled, with a sort of melancholy fondness - was lady sneasler’s favorite non-wild snack

They made their way back south to Mount Coronet before the day really started in Snowpoint - Days there started later due to the

weather, it was just how they lived. Akari recalled how the Pearl Clan did the same. Some things never change.

Oddly, the weather didn't get any warmer as they went south. Akari wondered if it was because of the mountain

But the trail was open, things seemed fine on this side of Coronet - so they marched on through the trailhead.

"Ah, I'm quite familiar with this trail, I think" Nobori commented "Do you recognize it, Akari?"

"Hm?" she looked around at the trail, seeing certain trees and crags of rocks. "Oh, yeah! This is where we walked wit' lady S'easler!" She bounced

"That is the Sneasel Evolution you told us about, yes?" Ingo asked.

"The Noble that you were the servant of?" Emmet added

"I was her *warden*" Nobori corrected "Not her servant. Very different"

"She liked goin' out and takin' walks!" Akari added "An-an she reeeeeeeeeally liked da-the berries tha' grew here!" She motioned to the shrubs growing low to the ground alongside the trail.

"Ah, I thought she was the noble of the cliffs?" Emmet recalled. "Why would she come here?"

"She also liked the mountain" Nobori argued "She was a worldly pokemon for her time"

"Wordly? Bu' she was a regional var'yant" Akari pointed out

Emmet sniggered

Nobori sighed at the humor "I thought as your pseudo-fictional father, dad jokes were my job?" he pointed out

"Well you aren' sayin' any, an' won' take off da-the leash!" She pointed out

"I won't take it off if you keep sassing me, little missy" He playfully pointed out

“Wah- *Mean* !” Akari pouted intensely

“Not mean!” Emmet defended “Just being a dad!”

Akari’s pout turned into a scowl - her cheeks red.

“Akari, you are not even attached to the leash. You are just wearing the backpack” Ingo reasoned “It is not currently affecting you negatively.”

“Still bad. Still hate it” Akari huffed almost agressively.

Nobori sighed differently, turning his gaze up the mountain, seeing just how much further they had to go - his thoughts wandered elsewhere “This is gonna be a long hike. I can feel it” Nobori muttered.

“Hm? Why is that?” Emmet asked.

“Issit cause we’re all talkin?” Akari added a question

“No, no it’s-” Nobori sighed “Nevermind. Let’s keep going”

Akari pouted at that non-response, running on her little legs to catch up to him and grab his hand, stopping him in his tracks. He looked down at her with a little confusion.

“Hm?”

“Are’ou okay?” Akari pouted “M’sorry”

“What - “ Nobori started a bit “no, Akari, I didn’t-” He quickly picked the girl up, as if checking to make sure he hadn’t made her upset. “I think that the stress of the journey has begun to get to me” He admitted, resting the girl on his arm and looking back at Ingo and Emmet “I am sorry”

“Don’t be!” Emmet responded, waving off the apology “I imagine this has been a verrrrr-y long last few weeks!

“Agreed” Ingo nodded “I mean.. I *will* be able to understand, in the future, but as of now, I can at least sympathize with your plight.”

Akari hugged him around the neck, trying to give him some sort of comfortable squeeze “Do ya need t’rest? We can take a break!”

“No, it’s alright. Do *you* need a break?”

“We jus’ started!!”

“Agreed, so no break is needed yet” he gave her nose a playful little “boop”, and put her back down as she let out a little laugh “Let’s keep going. Having to go the back way means that this is going to take us longer. No more delays!”

“Safety first!” Emmet added

“All clear! Let us depart!” Ingo finished

“Train stuff!” Akari shouted right after, getting a rather hearty laugh from the adults. Her grin showed that that had been her goal, and she bounced on her heels before running ahead.

“ *Full Steam Ahead, Guys!* !”

Nobori had missed the chilled air of the highlands and the mountain.

As Lady Sneasler’s warden, he often found himself joining her on her various hunts and travels through the highlands and often up the mountain for food and various den supplies - it was one of his important tasks (one more unique to his lady than to others)

They were some of his most peaceful memories of his time in Hisui. It was something that he knew he would miss - and now that he was back here, even so far into the future, he could feel that ache of memory.

Knowing that the Hisuian Sneasel was extinct was… something he was still trying to process.

But that was neither here nor there - at least not now. Now, they were taking a break by a mountain stream that seemed to have still been there from way back when - that was a nice little thing, for his sense of direction if nothing else.

Akari was - as per usual whenever they took a walking break -

sleeping. Nobori could only imagine how much this walking was tiring her little legs out.

She was curled up adorably in his lap while he munched on some miscellaneous trail mix snacks they'd bought in Snowpoint. Meanwhile, ingo and Emmet were actively texting Elesa to keep her up to date on all the mild adventure they'd undergone so far (God, he missed her too. Did his Elesa also miss him? He missed a lot of people, it seemed)

"She wants a picture of him" Ingo pointed out - finally speaking for the first time in several minutes. "For posterity, she says"

"I am unsure if that is wise" Emmet commented, brow furrowed.

"What do you think, Nobori?" Ingo asked, looking over to him

"Hm.. Well, you have seen me, and you said you took a photo of me for her already, correct?" Nobori reasoned, "As long as you don't share it publicly, it should be fine."

"Are you sure?"

Nobori nodded - not seeming all that bothered by it from the look of things.

Ingo lifted up his phone to take the photo, and Nobori was looking to pay attention (not pose, he wasn't one for posing, but -

" *Mmh* "

"Ah, Akari? Are you waking up?"

Getting an idea quite suddenly, Ingo turned the mode on his phone from photo to video, and pressed record.

The child blearily looked up at him "mmh.. R'we goin' yet?"

"Not yet. If you wish, you can return to sleep" Nobori muttered to her, pushing her hair from her face "I will wake you when we start walking again."

She took a second to take in his words before curling back up against

him again. “Huh… kay - t’anks daddy…” She muttered as she almost immediately drifted off back into her nap.

Nobori exhaled rather deeply, cheeks a comical, bright red despite the now frequently used term he was being called these days.

Ingo pressed send.

“Hm?” Nobori looked back up at him.

“Nothing” Ingo responded, perhaps too quickly.

Elesa responded to the video within the minute

“WAIT WAIT I FORGOT ABOUT THE BABY IS THE BABY MY NIECE DO I HAVE A NIECE???”

Ingo chuckled, looking up at Nobori from the text message, who was giving him a confused expression.

And yet, as he did so, he was still crading the child in his arms with such gentle care.

… Not for the first time, Ingo thought that being a dad wouldn’t be such a bad thing, really.

“….Wait”

Nobori put his arm out to stop the party on the inclining slope.

They’d been walking pretty peacefully up the mountain trail - with the map showing they were well over halfway there - making great time for how far away they were from their destination! Even as the air continued to chill, Akari was able to easily keep up with the group,

making sure to mostly stay in step with Nobori as the terrain gradually began to become more sparse and the trail increased in its incline gradually.

“What is it?” Emmet asked, trying to look ahead with a lean.

There was further silence for a moment, before Akari turned her head. “... i’s the sounds” Akari pointed out “... the sounds pokemon’s gone”

“What..?” Ingo quieted after his question, and realized that Akari was correct - the ever-present background noise of pokemon was… gone. Not even a sound of fluttering grass was around them.

“When no pokemon are in an area, that usually means there is a predator pokemon nearby” Nobori explained “Most likely an Apex predator.”

“Usually a’ alpha” Akari added “We godda be careful! Keep an’ ear out!”

“Indeed… we must proceed with much caution,” Nobori noted, but continued to walk, with Akari staying right up next to him, grabbing his hand.

Ingo and Emmet both nodded in response, their anxiety levels rising in tandem as they continued their walk along the trail, suddenly hyper aware of every sound around them

Now that the conversation between the travelers had died, the lack of background noise from the mountain’s landscape was … disconcerting. What could the pokemon possibly have run from? There weren’t any known apex predators on mount coronet.

At least, none that the twins were aware of.

“CHING CHING CHING CHING!!”

“CHING CHING CHING CHING!!”

“CHING CHING CHING CHING!!”

“CHING CHING CHING CHING!!”

“Ching’ling?” Akari called out, looking around for the source of the distressed pokemon.

Before anyone could react to anything else, a small flock of the previously shouting chingling rushed in the opposite direction from the group, looking quite understandably panicked as they flew by, and a snarled hiss was heard just around the bend of the trail.

Nobori’s head turned sharply at the sound, eyes wide.

Akari’s were too, but gasped as well, hand still tightly holding his.

“... Dad” Akari’s voice was quiet, but tense “Is.. is that-”

“It… There is no way, she is couldn’t have-”

SHING!

Long, sharp claws came from around the sharp trail bend, and Akari squealed in surprise as they seemed to grab the edge and pull whatever they were connected to around the trailbend, the claws were insanely long, and dark in color with a rather shocking pop of pink.

Nobori looked like he could not believe what he was seeing, his grip on Akari’s hand was getting so tight it bordered on painful.

“*... My Lady?* ”

Akari took a few, tiny steps back, stopped only by Nobori’s lead feet. “No way…”

Ingo and Emmet recalled who “my lady” was referring to, and were also quite baffled, even moreso when Nobori started to back up with

Akari's pulling as a motivator right as the Sneasler fully came around the bend.

The noble of the cliffs was definitely there - tall, imposing, her claws brandished as if someone poor foolish predator was attempting to go at her kits and her warden - her fangs showing in a blatant and threatening snarl

In any other situation, Nobori would be feeling intense, pleased relief at seeing his noble again - perhaps he'd even be excited! And definitely confused

But -

"We have to go back!" He shouted, looking back briefly at Emmet and Ingo, who gave the man slightly baffled, mostly freaked out expressions

"What??" Emmet gaped "but-!!"

The noble snarled - shutting Emmet right up with a startled jump. Her eyes were glowing a distressing, angry red as she stared down at them, not a hint of recognition in her eyes

Akari, voiced laced with too much alarm to care much for annunciating, shouted as they began their retreat -

"She's… *She's F'enzied!!!* "

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

> A little bit of chaos! But few questions ending up answered when all is said and done

Getting back down the mountain was exhausting for all involved - Akari especially, though that goes without saying.

But, the currently feral Lady Sneasler wasn't chasing them down. Her snarling and angry yowling seemed to have been an attempt to scare them away, which was baffling Nobori even more. The frenzies rarely - if ever - came with any rational thought of any kind. Even instinct was frequently tossed out the proverbial window.

Akari looked *completely* worn out, having been picked up about halfway down the trail after she'd nearly fallen on her face, with Ingo having gotten her by using one of the straps on her leash backpack.

There was a joke in there, but no one was feeling very funny right then.

"... *That* was…. Lady Sneasler?" Emmet asked, taking deep breaths to slow his rushing heartbeat.

"... Unfortunately, yes… While she was- she *was* different from her usual personality, I would know her anywhere" Nobori answered definitively

"Ye-yeah… i'was'er" Akari nodded in agreement with slightly slurred speech from just how out of breath she felt despite being carried. That exhaustion was catching up to her and was starting to make her look like she was about to cry, which she attempted to avoid by taking deep breaths.

Ingo was rubbing her back in an effort to comfort her, other arm still holding her up despite the ache "You have described frenzies to us before, but there has been no rift, nor any lightning storms… Why

would she be frenzied?"

"I don't know" Nobori answered "To be frank, there is no way that she could have lived so long, she looks just as she did when I left, and Sneaslers are not immortal or as long lived as say, a ninetails"

"Den…" Akari took a breath that turned into an exhausted yawn "Den maybe i'was a dist'rtion?"

Nobori contemplated the idea "A distortion…. That does seem like a viable option. But Lady Sneasler is always quite careful, and there has never been an instance of a distortion taking something from the past into the future … only from the future into the past"

"Doesn't mean it didn'happen" Akari reasoned, starting to look like she was going to pass out right there on Ingo's shoulder

"Hm… that is definitely a possibility" Nobori agreed, reaching over to take Akari from Ingo's arms.

Ingo seemed… reticent, to do so, but handed the girl over, and by the time she was settled against Nobori's shoulder, she looked ready to sleep, head lolling.

"Ughhhh" She groaned "Whyyyy am i tii-red??"

"Because we just ran for our lives and you nearly did a verrrrrrrry bad faceplant?" Emmet argued giving his head a tired scratch. "We are also tired"

"But it seems we are safe. I hear pokemon around us" Ingo pointed out. "That means that they feel safe. We must have gone quite far in our retreat"

They all seemed to pause at Ingo's statement, and heard that welcomed background noise before calming just a little.

"... We gotta quell it. She's godda be in lotsa pain…" Akari whined with a yawn, rubbing at her face, though she still had concern in her expression "Frenzies always hurt the noble…"

Nobori nodded rather seriously "She is correct. But how?"

Ingo sighed deeply, rubbing the back of his neck “I think we need to sit. We’re all… scrambled from that situation”

“I agree,” Emmet nodded, taking a second to adjust his backpack “we need to reconvene more solidly - make plans”

“Think through what we can do,” Ingo added.

Nobori agreed “Akari? Do you agree?”

The girl nodded “Let’s go back down a lil more” She pointed “T’that creek”

The group found a good little area near the mountain creek, and collectively sat around in a circle, the sound of the creek in the background. Akari was more awake, looking like she was in deep thought.

“Hm…” Akari tapped her head, as if she was trying to get her brain to work

“Akari?” Nobori questioned the expression

“We gotta calm her down.. We gotta make balms!” The girl concluded.

“With what?” Ingo questioned “You said that the balms were made of their favorite foods?”

Akari nodded in agreement “Yeah.”

“I have some mamoswine jerky” Nobori reminded, “but I’m not sure-”

“The berries!!” The girl bounced, suddenly more awake as she realized what they had, “We have the berries!”

Nobori’s eyes lit up at the realization

“Correct! Bravo, Akari!” He nodded, giving the child a quick, reassuring squeeze. “We must make our way further down to get them to make the balms, then.”

“Le’sgo Then!!” Akari pointed down the mountain… Right before letting out yet another yawn.

Nobori chuckled, letting a breath out that seemed much more relieved

than the last, and he readjusted Akari in his arms

“Yes, lets”

Balms were rather easy to make once they’d managed to locate some fabric they didn’t mind parting with - and a sharp enough knife

RIP to Emmet’s button-down shirt he’d shoved at the bottom of his backpack.

Some of them were made with berries, others with the jerky pieces, and a few duds made with dirt simply to get her attention should she get more aggressive. Akari said that it was always a good idea to have a few of those on hand.

“You don’ wanna have to waste the real balms. Helps t’have some duds.” She stated with a firm grunt as she finished tying off one of the dirt bombs in question

“Ah, that makes sense,” Emmet nodded, making another balm with the jerky.

“When did you discover this, Akari?” Nobori asked. “You were not doing this with Lord Electrode”

“Oh, uh, with Lord Arcanine” She explained “It helped lots with him in particular. With all the lava an’ stuff. Iscan helped out”

“Ah… that sounds correct” Ingo nodded “I am happy that Iscan was able to assist you. So I heard, Lord Arcanine’s situation was quite… unique”

Ingo and Emmet shared a look, and Ingo looked back at Akari and Nobori, speaking up for the first time in some minutes since he’d started work on balms.

“Akari, we have a question”

The girl looked over at them “Hm?”

“Do you know what caused the frenzies of the nobles?” Emmet asked

The girl furrowed her brow, head tilting. ‘Hm… I don’ really know f’r sure - we never found th’source. But… We think it mighta been… somethin T’do with the dist’r’tion realm… with Giratina”

“Giratina? The *ruling being* the Distortion realm?” Ingo questioned further.

Akari nodded, her expression rather serious. “It just… it makes sense.”

Nobori nodded along, tone also rather serious “It does - it makes more sense than any other theory we attempted to use to explain. Particularly after a... certain event”

“*Certain event? ”*

Emmet’s question seemed to hit some sort of nerve, causing Akari’s expression in particular to get nervous. Nobori, on the other hand, looked angry - though it seemed not to be directed at anyone.

Akari bit her lip, but continued, a certain tenseness to her voice “Yeah… there was - “

“You do not have to talk about him, Akari. Not if you don’t want to” Nobori pressed, the anger dissipating, looking concerned.

“No.. I’s fine” She took a deep breath - looking back up at the twins “Giratina was workin’ with someone.. That someone might have been why it all happened”

Ingo’s tone was cautious, but inquisitive “A person? A *human* ?”

Akari nodded “Yeah.. He was uhm, he was a merchant. I tou- thought he was m’friend, but he wan’ed t’use me t’get to Arceus”

“To get to Arceus? What for?” Ingo continued to try to keep his questions not *too* invasive. He didn’t remember much about this part of their story. They’d stated that they had an “altercation” with Giratina, but not much else

“He was under the rather demented impression that he could convince Arceus to remake the world in his image” Nobori explained, a particular venom to his tone. “He thought that with the power of Arceus’ plates and the god itself he could start from scratch”

“That is indeed quite demented” Emmet commented “But what about his delusions leads to the distortions and the nobles?”

“Giratina’s realm is the the distortion realm, if *he* meant to cause havoc, then keeping everyone preoccupied with frenzies and nobles was an idea, even if it didn’t pan out in his favor” Nobori explained further. “He teamed up with Giratina, and we believe that he caused it”

“Yeah, an- an’ i’ might be why Dad ended up there” Akari reasoned.

“Ah… yes” Ingo took that information in, recalling their previous conversation “You are under the impression that you and Akari were summoned differently into the past? That seems unlikely.”

“Its moreso a very strong hypothesis” Nobori corrected “Akari has always had more knowledge of herself than I did, as stated prior”

“An’ I remember talkin’ t’Arceus before bein’ dropped in the ocean like a magikarp” Akari muttered “Dad doesn’.”

“Ah” Emmet nodded, understanding the theory better now, before asking, cautiously “but, they - that man and giratina - are not here… right?”

Akari’s expression bordered on unreadable, but lucky for her, she didn’t need to answer.

“No” Nobori solidly stated - with an amount of conviction that left Ingo and Emmet with more questions than answers.

“You are very sure of that,” Emmet pointed out.

Nobori nodded “I am”

Akari looked up at him with a bit of surprise. “But there might be-”

“ *He is not here* ”

Nobori’s tone left the conversation dead in its tracks, and Akari looked sheepish and nervous about it.

Ingo looked a little alarmed at the defensive tone, not hiding the

alarmed look in his eyes for a moment before deliberately changing the subject - this track had reached its end rather abruptly "... Let's make the rest of the balms"

"Yes, lets" Emmet agreed rather quickly.

Akari pouted at the adult silence, but sighed, eyes back down at the food in her hands. That was going to have to be a topic for another time, it seemed.

Time to focus on Lady Sneasler's quelling

"But *why* ??"

"Because I am not risking you getting in the way of her claws"

"But the *Leash* ????"

Nobori was unswayed by the whining as he clipped said leash right to the back of her little backpack, and handed the other end of the leash to his younger self "You will stay behind with Ingo. Emmet and I will lure Lady Sneasler."

Her scowl at this plan - and the subsequent leasing - was quite impressive.

"Hah! She looks just like you with such a frown" Emmet pointed out

Ingo watched with some amusement at just how red both Akari and Nobori's faces turned at Emmet's explanation and held the leash firmly in his non-dominant hand, with the balms easily accessible to the other.

"We have a very important job, little Akari! We must be ready!" Ingo pointed out with gusto "Let us prepare quickly as Emmet and Nobori do their part!"

Though clearly still displeased, she looked away from Ingo and back to Nobori. Her expression now looked more worried and defeated.

“... Be safe, Akari. Stay with Ingo, throw the balms with precision” Nobori instructed, his tone showing his own concern for the upcoming situation. He cautiously adjusted her headband. He was knelt down still from adjusting her little leash backpack, and that made it easier for Akari to reach forward and grab his hand, before saying.

“.. You be safe too, daddy” She squeezed his hand as strongly as her little hand could

He released his hand from her hold, and held her head for a moment, before kissing her forehead quickly, and standing up “I will”

And then he joined Emmet, pivoting and taking brisk strides to catch up to the rushing twin, leaving Akari there with her face showing a level of surprise that might have left Nobori feeling the need to explain herself.

Ingo watched Akari as she observed Ingo and Emmet disappearing behind the cover of the trees, and the two of them were left behind at the edge of the clearing they’d chosen to lure the noble to.

“...Akari?” He called her attention, and she seemed to snap out of some worried haze.

“Huh?“

“Your father will be alright” Ingo remembered, and he managed not to laugh when her entire face turned bright red. She turned away from him, looking at her feet in those new little snorunt boots.

“He’s - yeah, I know” She muttered in response

Ingo rose an amused brow “Oh? I’m surprised”

“At what?” She looked back up.

“You didn’t argue about me calling him your dad” he pointed out, admittedly looking a bit flustered himself.

“I.. Well…” She thought, wondering what to say next.

“Well..?” Ingo encouraged, swallowing any nervousness he was feeling - this was about Akari, at least right now.

Akari sighed, holding some balms in her hand and on her lap as she decided to sit down. “... I like Akari Sho.” She stated.

“Hm? Sho? That’s the last name that you and Nobori have been using, yes? It is not your original last name?”

She nodded “Its not my last name but… I like Akari Sho. Akari Fletcher is… she doesn’ have a dad. Akari Sho has one.”

Ingo thought about the layers under those two sentences. “... Akari Fletcher has a mother, yes?”

Akari nodded

“And you miss her?”

she nodded again “But.. she doesn’ have a dad. Akari Sho does. Akari Sho could ‘ave both… but Akari Fletcher won’t”

Ah.

“... Well, Why can’t Akari Fletcher also have one when she gets home?” he asks, eyes forward - slightly concerned that looking at her might make her even more nervous.

“... This is all jus’ pretend” Akari reminded “I’s just f’r safety. When we get back, he’ll be himself, an’ i’ll be m’self. Akari Sho won’ exist anymore”

Ingo looked somewhat unimpressed at her logic.

“Do you think that he does not care about you that way?” Ingo questioned?

“.. Why would he?” She asked as if it was obvious

Ingo contemplated “Then ask yourself “why wouldn’t he?””

Akari looked at him at last, confused by the question “Huh?”

“I want you to think about why he *wouldn't* care about you that way. See if you can justify it the other way around”

“Like, why would he *not* want to be my dad?”

“Mhm. Can you think of anything?”

The child seemed to genuinely think about it, brow furrowing adorably as she contemplated the thought exercise.

Ingo waited in silence for a while - just to give her a little more time to commiserate, before continuing.

“I cannot think of any reason. And seeing as I am the past version of him, I think my opinion on this holds a little more weight, hm?”

Her expression looked pensive at his statement.

Ingo looked back towards the clearing from their hiding place behind a patch of bushes “Now, let us focus. They will be luring her over here any moment now”

Akari seemed to snap out of her intense thoughts, and gave him a firm nod “Yeah - yeah we godda focus”

And the conversation died there - the two of them keeping their eyes sharp and forward as they waited with bated breath for the start of the impending chaos.

They just had to be patient and attentive. What was coming next was going to be stressful, to say the least. Ingo had one hand on the balms, the other gripping the leash. He wasn’t about to let that girl disappear on him in all the chaos.

The sound of running - that *thump thump thump!* of boots on dirt - was the first alert to the oncoming commotion

The next was the harsh *SHING!* of the nobles claws digging into anything it could grab to pull herself forward - at least, Akari knew that was the reason.

“BE PREPARED!!”

“INCOMING!!!”

Akari held one balm in each hand, eyes sharp and heartbeat accelerated. It was a familiar feeling - if not exactly a welcome one, but she was prepared.

They had to calm her down *quickly* .

Akari spotted Emmet through the trees first. His eyes were wide, and he looked rightly spooked as he rushed by almost frantically.

Nobori was next - expression far more determined and focused (This, of course, was not his first time running away from a feral-adjacent pokemon, but that was beside the point). He caught Akari's stare, and warned her with a shout-

"Wind up!!!"

"SNAWRRRRR!!"

Akari didn't hesitate to toss a balm as hard as she could the moment the purple fur came into view behind Nobori.

Ingo joined her in the aim, and the 'battle' began!

The bombardment was chaotic, which was exactly how they wanted it to go in order to keep Lady Sneasler guessing, keep her turning around and unable to attack as they quelled the frenzy.

Ingo and Akari threw the balms, and Emmet and Ingo got and kept her endlessly fractured attention.

At one point, Nobori released his Giscor for added assistance in distracting Sneasler, and Emmet followed suit with galvantula - instructing her to hide in the surrounding trees so she was protected.

As the quelling continued, Akari kept a close eye on the amount of balms that Ingo and her had. She was starting to run out of balms, but in tandem, Lady Sneasler was running out of steam. Her movements began to get clumsy and sluggish - which made her somewhat more dangerous.

They just had to be careful, they were almost there. They were *almost there*

“Ingo! Status!” Emmet called out from the other side of the clearing, garnering Sneasler’s attention yet again.

“We’re down to our last 5 bombs!”

“Each???”

“In total!” Akari clarified

“Oh - Oh dear” Emmet muttered

“Then we must go on the offensive!” Nobori called out “We have to wear her out more than just with the balms!! Akari - I require Samurott’s assistance, if you please!”

Akari gave him a firm nod, grabbing her bag “Got it!”

The girl took out the pokeball, tossing it out while shouting the command- “Sam!! Help Dad and Gliscor!!!”

The pokemon landed with a thud, ready to take orders from Nobori - looking straight at him- letting out a “*Roh!!!*” in conformation.

“Samurott, support Gliscor, use strong style moves!” Nobori instructed with a rather intense bite to his boisterous voice. “Gliscor, offensive! Follow your best instinct!”

“We need to end this quickly!” Ingo argued aloud, managing to get a balm directly in the noble's face “Four left!”

“Agreed!” Emmet pointed “Galvantula, attempt to hold down the noble with your webs!”

The arachnid pokemon swiftly listened to her trainer, and the webs were quite effective at sticking to the now tired but still enraged Sneasler, getting her planted in one place as Akari got the back of her head with another balm

“Three left!!”

“Samurott, hydropump! Gliscor, distract as the attack hits! Disorient!!” Nobori shouted.

Another attack bombarded lady Sneasler, causing the noble to fall down to one knee, letting out an angry hiss and yowl, fighting against the webbing still.

“I am sorry, My lady - Another balm! Ingo!”

Ingo pitched one at the pokemon’s back, and it exploded rather dramatically and Nobori could see the haze in his noble’s eyes dissipate even more, despite the continued weak thrashing.

“Galvantula, one more time with your webbing! We’re almost there!” Emmet encouraged, pointing directly at Lady Sneasler’s legs.

Galvantula squeaked out a confirmation to her trainer, and yet another blast of webbing kept the pokemon down on her one knee.

“Two left!!” Ingo proclaimed

“Sammy!!” Akari called out sharply “Shadow ball! Knock her over!!”

Just as the samurott sent that attack barreling towards the pokemon, Akari threw her final balm - nailing the pokemon right on the shoulder.

“I’m all out!” She shouted, eyes staring intensely as Lady Sneasler. She was almost knocked out of it, she could tell! She looked to Nobori, whose eyes were also trained on the noble.

“Gliscor, assist Ingo!” Nobori instructed

“Sco?”

“The other me, Gliscor!”

“Sco!”

The pokemon promptly ended up by Ingo's side with a scree

"Thank you, future companion. We must make this balm count!" Ingo confirmed

The bat pokemon gave a determined nod.

"I need her distracted - one more time…" Ingo looked ahead at the weakly thrashing pokemon - just one more balm, and this would be over. He held the balm firmly in one hand, hoping that luck was on his side as he commended "Gliscor, Aerial Ace!"

Gliscor attack on the noble landed with no issue, and Lady Sneasler was laying on the ground.

Ingo would never have a better opportunity, and he aimed with the accuracy of a world-class baseball pitcher.

The final balm hit its target, and the pokemon stilled in its weakened thrashing.

The humans surrounding Lady Sneasler all waited with bated breath for her to move, and when she didn't, there was a collective sigh, though no one's guard was down just yet....

Akari came out from behind hers and Ingo's hiding place, gently yanking a the stupid leash to get him to let go of it. When he did, she started walking around to look at the Noble's face - Nobori right behind her.

"... Lady S'easler?" Akari cautiously called out

There was no verbal response, but Nobori saw her move slightly, as if shifting herself, and stepped forward, ahead of Akari.

"... My Lady, Are you back with us? Have you returned from your frenzy?"

It was a few more moments of movement and some grunts, but

eventually, Lady Sneasler raised her head to look at the man when he spoke, eyes clear. The expression on her face was some sort of confusion.

"*... Snaw?* "

Nobori's hand reached out, and the recognition in her eyes was vastly relieving. When she leaned into his hand as he rubbed the side of her head, he his relief was solidified, and he gave his noble one of his rare little smiles.

"Welcome back to earth, my lady." He greeted softly, as Akari bounced in the background, delighted and thrilled that the quelling had worked.

"Yay! Lady S'easler's back!" She squealed happily.

As Lady Sneasler came more and more into awareness, she managed (With a little help from Nobori) to sit up and look around, seeming appropriately confused as to her situation.

"My Lady?"

" *Snaw?* "

"Yes, it is me. I am your warden" Nobori stated. Sneasler's skeptical look made Akari giggle.

At the giggle, Lady Sneasler looked over at Akari with wide curious eyes, head tilted in further confusion. " *Snee?* "

"Uh, Hi" The child waved, feeling a little nervous at the scrutiny - then again, its not like Lady Sneasler knew what had happened over the last few weeks "I's me, lady! I's 'kari"

Lady Sneasler looked rather unimpressed and unconvinced at the declaration, leaning over and giving the girl a sniff, before startling and leaning back with a surprised *"Snaw????* "

"Yup! Told'ya!" Akari grinned, putting her hands on her hips with a certain amount of sass.

"We are both in the future, but not in Akari and mine's proper future.

It is.. Confusing.” Nobori admitted. “And we are quite unsure as to how you are here”

“.. Is it safe for us to approach?” Emmet questioned from behind a tree, poking out his head. “She seems cognizant, but I am unfamiliar with her tells”

Sneasler looked over at Emmet, eyes still wide, seeming even *more* confused.

Ingo walked around the back of the noble, and Akari couldn’t stop laughing as Lady Sneasler looked between the three men as if she was being struck with double team. The poor Noble was shaking her head as if disoriented.

“... This is going to take a while to explain to the Sneasler” Emmet pointed out, arms crossed “She is certainly going to need to explain herself as well… somehow”

“I am sure” Ingo agreed

“We gotta get ‘er outta the webs!” Akari pointed. “Before we do anythin’ else!”

“Oh, yes! Of course!” Nobori nodded, looking over to Gliscor as Akari recalled her samurott, and Emmet recalled Galvantula “Gliscor, if you please”

“Scor!”

With a simple clip of the bat pokemon’s claws, Sneasler was freed, and the first thing she did was stand up to her full height and check herself over, shaking out her stiffness, and then -

“GAH!”

“Akari?!”

None of the adults had been prepared for Akari to get straight up ‘yoinked!’ by lady sneasler, who held the small child with a surprising amount of carefulness so as to not hurt the girl with her poisonous

claws. Unsure as to why she was lifted up, Akari was getting sniffed yet again by the noble, who seemed to be baffled at the familiar scent.

“Uh.. yeah, Lady S’easler, i’s me” Akari repeated “I know i’m small but… i’s me”

The noble stared down at the child in her arms for a moment, before letting out a pleased, chirp of acknowledgement of her identity, giving the child an affectionate nuzzle… right before-

“Gah! No!!! Stop!”

Ah yes. Licking her hair. Lady Sneasler *definitely* knew this was Akari.

“My lady, please,” Nobori huffed, hands on his hips as if ready to discipline the noble. “Put Akari down, if you might!”

“ *Snawr!* ” She seemed to argue, though Akari quietly thanked him for getting her to stop licking her hair. ew.

There was an unfamiliar, startled and surprised voice coming from behind the group “What in the *hell*-”

The group turned their heads to the new voice - It was that pokemon ranger from a few days prior - the blonde woman who had been standing guard at the south entrance- when on earth had she gotten to this side of the mountain??

“Wait - Eileen, what the hell- “

Another ranger with two-toned hair came up behind her in a frustrated huff, before staring at the noble and blubbering out-

“Is that a fucking *sneasler*?”

A trio of male voices scolded him at the same time with a simple, simultaneous -

“Language!”

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

A prelude to the final act

“Okay…. So. Let me see if I can sum this up”

Aiden, two-tone haired ranger (Blue and blonde) ran a hand through his undercut, clearly attempting to compartmentalize what just been explained to him by the trio of men and the articulate 5 year old who was staring up at him, waiting for him to continue

Ilene - the blonde with her hair up in a high ponytail - looked just as confused, but was keeping quiet, her arms crossed as she looked mostly at Akari and Nobori.

“You” he pointed to Nobori “Are him” he pointed to Ingo “from the *future* , but you went back to the distant past, but then jumped forward, but not forward enough and your age regressed so that you two are the same age because you weren’t sent forward enough in time, you think?”

“Yes” Nobori confirmed.

“And you” he pointed to Akari. “Are also a time traveler whose age has regressed because you weren’t returned to your correct time, which is further in the future from the past you were in, but you haven’t run into the version of you that is this age from this current timeline so there’s no confusion on your end?”

“... uh.. Yes? Yes.” She tried to give as confident an answer as she could

“And *that*” he finally pointed to Lady Sneasler, who was seated rather casually “Is *The* Lady Sneasler - the Noble of the Cliffs from *ancient Sinnoh* who appeared - according to you - “out of nowhere” in a rabid frenzy that you managed to “quell” before she could seriously hurt anyone? And she's the one who’d been causing the ruckus on the mountain?”

“Precisely!” Emmet nodded

“And on top of all of that” Ileen spoke up “You are actively attempting to summon the deities of time and space once you get up the mountain?”

“Indeed” Nobori nodded “That sums it up quite nicely”

“…. Sweet Arceus, this sure is some timey-wimey bullshit, huh?” Aiden commented, getting a shush from both Emmet and Nobori

“Language” Ingo scolded “There is a child here!”

“Aughhh I’m no’a baby!! I can hear curses!” Akari whined.

“You are, at best, 15. Thats a gray area” Emmet argued.

“Bahhhhhh” the child groaned dramatically

Ilene’s eyes fell on Nobori’s warden bracelet, before looking back at him “Are you really trying to speak to them to get you back to your correct time? Both of them?”

“As many as we can get audience with - though ideally we would like to summon Arceus to return us” Nobori reasoned, getting a risen brow from Aiden.

“That’s bold” Aiden commented

“We gotta be” Akari argued, her tone surprisingly serious before she started whining again “I wanna be not-tiny. Being tiny suuuuuucks”

“You will be a teenager again soon, Akari. I can assure it” Nobori attempted to placate the child, who just looked at him before sticking her tongue out.

“ *Snawr?* ”

Aiden cleared this throat “Okay, so this is a *little* wild, and most of this is out of my wheelhouse, at least now, but as a ranger… I do have to ask what you plan on doing with uh, Lady Sneasler”

“She will be coming with me” Nobori stated, as if obvious.

“And when you get back to your time - what will you be doing with

her if she's following you there?" Aiden questioned "As a ranger, I keep an eye out for endangered pokemon, and well… not much more endangered than an extinct pokemon variant. There's going to be issues"

Nobori rose a brow at this

"What he's trying to say is-" Ilene interrupted "-That you're from Unova, yes? You .. might no be able to go back to Unova with Lady Sneasler, given the circumstances…"

"What? Why?" Ingo asked "Because she's "protected" and "endangered"? That isn't fair to him. He is her warden! Which by extension makes-"

As Ingo, Nobori, Ilene and Aiden began to get into an argument about Lady Sneasler and her future accommodations and status, Akari huffed as she realized they wouldn't be going anywhere for a hot minute, sitting herself down in the dirt.

Emmet sighed, deciding that sitting next to Akari would be more productive than attempting to but into the conversation. He sat himself down next to his niece, who was next to Lady Sneasler who had decided it was the perfect time to take a nap. He reached into his fanny pack (practicality over fashion!!), and looked at Akari. "Akari, would you like some jerky?"

She perked up at the offer,eyes wide "We still have some left?"

"It's not mamoswine" Emmet noted, seeing the girls face instantly sour - she preferred that kind, he'd noticed

"What is it?"

"Stantler"

The girl made an even funnier face of disgust "No thanks."

"Can I ask why?"

"Too Gamey" She winced "I don' like the taste"

"Wh- and Mamoswine *isn't* ?" Emmet questioned, almost looking offended, but Akari simply shrugged.

“Its *different* gamey” Akari responded “I like mamoswine gamey. Not s’antler gamey”

Emmet scoffed, rolling his eyes before taking a bite from his jerky “ ‘different gamey’ “ he grumbled, seeing Akari giggle at his reaction.

The conversation eventually ended when Lady Sneasler decided she’d spent enough time loitering and napping, and stood up abruptly.

“Snawr!!”

Nobori’s attention changed over to the noble almost instantly, the conversation dying immediately. “Hm? Yes, My Lady?”

“Snee!” The Sneasler pointed up the mountain. *“Snaw snaw!”*

“I think she doesn’t wish to linger any longer,” Nobori translated. “And I agree”

“We have not been lingering” Aiden argued, letting out a frustrated huff “.. but perhaps it is time to get you all up the mountain. We are, in fact, losing daylight.”

“What? You’re coming?” Akari questioned, standing up alongside Emmet, who gave her a hand “Both of you?”

“Of course!” Ilene confirmed with a determined nod of her head “We can keep people away and safe! Lady Sneasler is uh, quite the trouble magnet, it seems…”

“Snawr” The pokemon seemed proud of that statement, raising her head with a certain amused smugness

“Hm, it's not a bad idea. Safety in numbers and all that” Emmet argued.

“Are you sure you wish to accompany us?” Ingo questioned, giving a risen brow to the rangers.

“We are” Aiden responded with his own determined nod “Plus, we’re a little extra muscle if you need to fight a god!” The man gave a grin

to the group, nearly laughing.

That did seem to get a giggle out of Akari, who Aiden smiled at almost fondly before returning his attention to the other adults.

“Well. I supposed it wouldn't hurt” Nobori acquiesced, arms crossed before looking past the group “But we must make haste”

“Why?” Emmet questioned

“Because the day is running short” he repeated what Aiden said, pointing to the sky.

The entire group seemed to notice how late it was getting at the same time. The sun was starting to wane on one side of the horizon over the other. Emmet jumped a bit at the realization and looked to the group

“Oh, yes! Verrrrrry much yes! Let’s go! Let’s go!” Emmet clapped, starting to walk towards the path.

“I agree, post haste!” Ingo added

“Full Steam ahead!!” Akari added eagerly, bouncing on her toes before running after Emmet and shouting “Le’s go!!! I wanna be big again!!”

Aiden laughed, “Okay then, up the mountain we go!!”

With Aiden and Ilene coming along, the group was much more talkative and animated. It was a little loud, but also made even better, faster progress, oddly enough.

As the terrain got a little rougher towards the top, Akari found herself having to climb up steps and rocks that the adults were managing rather well just stepping over. It seemed to be going just fine! That is, until she lost her footing and was about to start tumbling down the boulder she’d just managed to climb up-!!

But someone managed to grab her backpack, and she stopped falling

with a jerk as everyone shouted.

“Hghk!!”

Akari turned her head, and saw that Emmet had grabbed the leash- which was still attached to her backpack - and that had been what stopped her fall. He looked a little startled, but mostly completely relieved, letting out a happy laugh.

“... Hah! It helped!”

“Emmet, now is *not the time* ” Ingo admonished from just behind him.

Aiden took a hot second to recover from being startled by the girl's near-fall but maneuvered himself between Nobori and Ilene, and below the girl “ Okay, Don’t risk pulling her back up, She’s just above me. Let her go - I've got her!”

“Sounds good to me!” Emmet called out “Ready Akari?”

The diagonal child still looked a little startled at her situation, but quickly agreed with a “Uh?? Sure???”

Emmet counted to three before he let go of the leash, the girl dropping into Aiden’s arms with a funny yelp, which got a laugh out of the man

“Hah! You’re so tiny and light!” He commented, bouncing her in his hold. “You remind me of my leafeon back home!"

Akari gave the ranger a quick scowl at the commentary from him, before the expression changed into a certain curiosity, like she’d just recognized something.

“... ‘r you related t’ the diamond clan?” She questioned, looking over his face.

“Hm?” Aiden furrowed his brow curiously a the question

“Aiden” Nobori approached him promptly, looking a little frazzled “Please”

“Oh, uh- “ Aiden could see the rather bothered expression on his face, and handed Akari over to Nobori, whose grip on the girl told her everything.

“I’m okay” She tried to comfort him, hand reaching up and patting his cheek. “I’s’okay”

“Hm” was all the man responded with. His grip on her not loosening at all

Ingo and Emmet shared a look of sympathy for Nobori’s feelings, but said nothing as they made their way over the terrain to join the rest of them.

Ilene furrowed her brow with some concern, but she took a breath before speaking out “Uh.. Shall we continue?”

“Yes, we’re almost to the ruins” Aiden pointed up the path “Spear pillar is just beyond here”

“Lets” Nobori responded, “But… It is too dangerous terrain-wise this way. I will continue carrying Akari until we get to more level ground.”

Akari sighed, seemingly resigning herself to this fate, if only to comfort the man after her near disastrous fall on the rocks “Okay”

The group started on their way once again, no one saying a word at Nobori’s reaction to Akari’s near-tumble. Fathers were just like that.

The ruins were in even more disarray than the last time Nobori had been there. Crumbling and cracking and broken. Somehow more desolate and sad. Somehow even more eerie with heavy air. He took a deep breath, holding Akari closer to him.

“.. It is odd, to be here again” he admitted with a certain titter to his

voice.

“Yeah,” Akari agreed, taking a careful look around. “I think I was here before… but still.. Weird..” She looked at him. “Can you put me down now please?”

“Are you sure?”

The child rolled her eyes before looking back at him “Yes, Daddy. Please put me down.”

Ingo chuckled as Nobori put Akari down, the girl making the dramatic decision to straighten out her coat once she was on her feet. Ingo stepped forward “Well, how are we to summon any of these gods now that we’re here?”

“With my flute!” Akari answers “Well, it’s not really *my* flute, but I was given it!”

“Your flute?” Emmet questioned

Akari knelt down on the rocky ground, and attempted to pull off the backpack. Though Nobori had to help her for a quick second (kid proof indeed), she got it off, and started going through it rather intensely.

“Hah, found it! My flute!” She held up the Celestica flute rather triumphantly

“... Is that the Celestica Flute??” Emmet questioned with a baffled expression “I have heard of that! Where did you get that??”

“Is that what it's called? It's just my flute”

Aiden couldn’t stop himself from laughing just a bit at the face Emmet was making, before looking out at the ruins, then back at Akari

“Hm… I wonder who your song will call” He questioned, giving a curious head tilt.

“We’ll have to see,” Akari responded, standing with just the flute in hand, leaving her backpack right there at her feet.

“We are ready when you are, Little Akari” Ilene encouraged, giving Akari a smile that she could have sworn she’d seen before. The little

girl gave Ilene a suspicious stare, which was responded to with confusion. Akari just shook her head, and took a breath before beginning to play the flute.

The surprisingly low pitch carried throughout the desolate ruins, the stale air beginning to thrum with the feeling of thunder and the smell of ozone - the song pressing through the space, and Ingo would swear it was surrounding them.

Akari stopped when a low thrum started, gripping the instrument with both hands as she looked up at the sky, which had begun to start swirling with a thunderous energy.

“…. I know who this is” Akari declared with a rather flat affect.

Nobori came up behind her, and grabbed onto her shoulder with a firm, reassuring hand “.. As do I. Quite frankly, I am glad it is responding. It is who I was wishing for”

“Hm? Who is it?” Emmet asked, cautiously approaching behind them.

The harsh, gold and white light comi ng from the clouds was telling, and Aiden stared up with surprised eyes as he realized just who had been summoned with the ancient song - recited by the very child he’d just been questioning.

“… The god of all pokemon… You summoned the god of all pokemon” he muttered in quiet disbelief.

Ilene came up alongside Aiden, ending up grabbing his hand with her own look of absolute bafflement “.. its ..”

Akari gripped the flute even tighter - staring up and ahead with a determined expression as a form began to take shape - unmistakable.

“Arceus”

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Goodbyes, and some questions are answered

"... Greetings, my chosen and-"

"YOU OVERGROWN DEERLING!!"

" *Akari* "

"No! He's finally here and I'm gonna let 'im **HAVE IT!!"**

The five year old stared up at the god with enraged defiance, an angry scowl about her adorable face as the god stared down at her, an expression of bemused confusion about its eyes. Nobori was watching her carefully, though there was a certain anxiety about his posture.

Arceus seemed rather unphased by the insult. *"Ah, I see you are upset"*

" Upset??? *Upset????? I've been stuck under three feet for a month!! A MONTH!!! AND YOU, YOU UNDERFED ALBINO* ***STANTLER- "***

" *O-kay,* that's enough" Nobori huffed in exasperation, putting a hand over her mouth before she could finish the more colorful version of that insult. "While I am also quite irate with you, Arceus, I think I can speak for both of us while she calms down"

"MMMPH!" Akari squirmed, though Nobori did not budge an inch.

"Ah…. What might be so upsetting? I see that I was perhaps off in returning you to the timeline, was I too far off?"

"You were extremely off" Nobori responded "Hilariously so. 10 years"

"Is ten years truly that far off for humans? It is such a short time" The god seemed to almost playfully contemplate the passage of time.

Nobori seemed unimpressed at the tone in return "Does your hero

look correct to you? The proper answer to that question is “no””

“She looks a little…. Smaller, that is true”

Akari looked like she wanted to yell more, so Nobori’s hand remained over her face.

“As you can see from the crowd here, we were very much sent to the wrong time, and had to make the arduous journey here to request that you fix this rather dramatic temporal displacement” Nobori explained, motioning with his free hand to the surrounding peoples “Including, quite randomly, Lady Sneasler. We are here to request a remedy for this”

“Ah…. that is why you came all the way here… with your alternate self and the others?”

“Indeed. Both him and Emmet assisted us. As well as these rangers here”

“Ah….”

The god finally looked at the others who were looking up at him with awe, confusion, and a little bit of fright. Aiden in particular had a very funny expression

“Ah yes… What is it you wish of me then, my champion?” Arceus gently requested *“I shall listen so long as you do not shout”*

Her eyes told it that she wasn’t pleased with the request. However, she did take a deep breath, and tapped Nobori’s hand over her mouth.

“Are you going to yell?”

“Mmhmmh”

“I am trusting you, Akari”

“Mmph dmmmph!”

Nobori - perhaps slower than he should have - removed his hand from covering her face, and the girl took a deep breath, exhaling and giving her head a shake before speaking

“I want to go to my *actual* time!”

“Your actual time? You mean where you were left off?”

“You know ‘actly what I mean” Akari crossed her arms.

“Actly?”

“It is not her fault she cannot annunciate. She did not ask to be in the body of a small child” Nobori defended. “We wish to go to our correct time.”

“I am aware of this. Was I truly so far off that you cannot… wait?”

“Ten years is too, too long, Arceus. It its the difference between a child and an adult, depending on the age”

“Hm… I suppose that is correct… What might the rest of you think, then?”

The god looked up at the other four, as well as Lady Sneasler, who was giving Arceus a rather unimpressed stare. Aiden and Ilene didn’t look like they were about to say anything, looking at each other, then back at the god. Ingo and Emmet looked up without looking away, but Emmet spoke first.

“They deserve to go back to their time. I imagine my future self is missing my brother” He stated.

“Ah.. yes… Emmet is correct. We are a two-car train” Ingo agreed

“I see” Arceus acknowledged. *“I will give no details, but his parting from you was needed, as painful as it may have been”*

“So it *WAS* Your fault?” Akari accused, though she didn’t yell.

“.. It was not, thought I completely understand your thinking” Arceus responded *“but I am omniscient, not omnipotent”*

“Tha’s just splitting hairs!”

“There’s actually a pretty big difference?” Aiden attempted to point out, but the glare he got from the child shut him right up. Arceus seemed to be unable to to (or didn’t care to) stop himself from chuckling.

“Now now, my champion. You have traveled far to rectify my… mistake. We shall see to correcting the error”

Ilene looked a bit suspiciously at the wording there, but said nothing.

“You better!”

“Akari” Nobori pressed “I would appreciate if you did not rudely talk to a god”

“They’re rude to me!”

“How?”

“BECAUSE I AM STILL TINY!”

“Indeed you are. Because we have not gotten to the part of this interaction where I return you to the correct time” Arceus pointed out

“… Oh” Akari looked at least a little bit sheepish. “But uh, can I ask one more question?”

“Certainly”

“Why’s lady S’easler here?” She pointed

Oh. Yeah. That.

“… I will admit we are all curious” Nobori admitted

“*Snawr?*”

“Ah… She bullied Dialga”

There was a comical beat of silence before Aiden spoke up “…. She *what* ?”

“She got Dialga to teleport her, looking for you, Warden”

“I - what - My *Lady* - I told you I was going home! We said our goodbyes!”

The Noble scoffed, her feather drastically being swept back. "*Snwar!*"

"She wished to go with you. She named one of her kits her successor."

Nobori looked a little exasperated at this, but Akari let out a laugh.

"Tha' sounds jus' like 'er!" She giggled "Guess she didn' wanna be lef' behind!"

Nobori sighed "Seems so. Is that what you want, Lady Sneasler?"

"Snee!"

"That means yes," Arceus translated.

"What are you waiting on then?" Aiden asked, "Quite a lot of time being wasted lolling about answering questions that could be answered later!!"

"I have something I must clarify before this odyssey is completed" Arceus stated, lowering its head at last

"What is it?" Nobori questioned.

Arceus looked over to Ingo and Emmet, and asked, rather bluntly:

"Do you wish to remember all of this?"

Ingo gave a confused expression at the question "... What?"

"If you wish, I can return your future self and my champion to their proper place, and remove these memories. Thus, you will not know of your fate. It could be comforting to you - both of you- should you choose it"

"...Oh" Emmet contemplated, arms crossed for a moment of thought before he stated, rather firmly. "I am afraid I cannot do that. I made a promise"

"A Promise?"

"Indeed!" Emmet nodded "A Pinky Promise! Those are quite important, as you know"

Arceus seemed more than a little amused as Emmet looked over to Akari, who he gave a grin and a wink too. The girl seemed more than touched at the matter, giving the man a grateful smile.

“Hm… I suppose such promises are very important, yes. Your memory will not be touched” Arceus conceded. *“But you… other twin”*

Ingo looked up at Arceus, managing to maintain a straight stare.

“Do you wish to remember? I can be selective, should you please.”

Ingo questioned “Why do you think that I would want to forget, if I may ask?”

“Because I cannot change what has already happened. This will happen to you. Are you okay with knowing that?”

Well, wasn’t that a hell of a question?

Ingo looked over at his older self, with his longer hair, his scarred hands, and those aged, wiser eyes. While he was alive, and while he was going home, there was a part of him that wondered if he wanted to know that this was in his future.

But then his eyes fell to the little girl holding his future self’s hand, looking at him with an understanding stare that proved there wasn’t a 5 year old soul behind those eyes.

He spent a few more seconds thinking, and looked back up to the god “No. I am secure in the knowledge you have provided”

Arceus gave a respectful nod to the twins' wishes *“I see. I am glad that you have found wisdom in this journey put upon you”*

“Put upon you?” Ilene voiced - repeating that particular phrasing with a slightly accusatory tone “Do you mean this was… “

“On purpose?” Aiden ended up finishing, getting an enlightened look of surprise as they shared a look..

Akari looked the most baffled at their conclusion, realizing what they were talking about. “Wha…”

Though Arceus did not respond, their silence was deafening.

Nobori took in a sigh, not wanting to open that can of worms. “We have delayed this long enough, Arceus. On purpose or not, I would like to return both of us home, *please* ”

“Yeah! I can be annoyed at you about the whole situation when I’m taller an’ older again!” Akari called out

Emmet can’t hold back a snort at the sentence. Ingo manages to.

“I suppose you have waited long enough, Champion”

“You bet your oversized ass I have!!!”

“Akari, for the love of the dragon of truth-”

“Such language!” Ingo commented

“Aw, quiet both of you, I think she’s at her limit” Aiden jokingly scolded Nobori and Ingo “No more dawdling! Time is being wasted, get them home!”

“This space has been lingered in long enough” Ilene agreed with a firm nod.

Arceus agreed *“Yes, yes. I shall get on with it, as you might say”*

“YES PLEASE!”

“Akari-”

“Daddy-”

“Don’t start now, Akari. Please”

The child just grumbled and rolled her eyes, but stopped arguing right then and there.

Arceus was looking quite bemused at the interaction.

“Say your goodbyes, should you wish to”

Oh, right.

This… *was* a goodbye wasn’t it?

This fact just hit Akari as Ilene and Aiden shared a look, before approaching the time travelers first. The rangers both gave them smiles, with Aiden's looking rather enthusiastic, while Ilene's was softer, almost sadder.

"Well, it was nice to know you! Come back in a decade - I'm sure we'll still be around here" Aiden encouraged.

"Certainly! This isn't goodbye - it's 'see you again soon!'... Kind of" Ilene encouraged with a rather big grin.

"Be safe, both of you" Aiden nodded, "And see you again soon"

Akari gave them both a nod, with a grateful smile "See you again soon!"

Nobori gave a grateful nod to the both of them, but turned his attention to Ingo and Emmet, who both looked to be about as conflicted at this goodbye as he was.

Emmet took a breath "I am Emmet. You are Ingo." He purposefully looked at Nobori "I take comfort in knowing that even though you and I are separated, you will be coming home. The version of me that is waiting for you now will be verrrrrry patient!"

"I am happy to hear that" Nobori answered "I look forward to truly reuniting with you"

"Excellent!" Emmet then looked down at Akari, who seemed a little unsure of how to say goodbye to him. He took a second to think before he took a few steps toward her, and knelt down, giving a sincere and much gentler smile than he usually had one his face to her "Miss Akari?"

".. Yes?"

"I cannot wait to meet you again" He assured her "And show you that I shall keep my promise"

Her misty eyes were more than enough of a response, and she grabbed him in a hug, getting a solid squeeze from Emmet, before letting her go and him grabbing her face.

“I cannot wait to meet my slightly taller niece!!”

That got a laugh out of the girl and he let go of her, standing up and looking back at Nobori

“See you both soon,” Ingo spoke out, getting their attention “It is … odd, to say goodbye like this, but I look forward to becoming you, as… fraught as some of it seems… it also seems to be worth it, in the end.”

The two versions of the same man seemed to keenly understand what was said there, and they shared a nod.

“Thank you” Akari voiced, looking up at him with a gracious smile “It was nice t’see what you look like when you’re not tired all the time”

Emmet couldn’t be bothered to hold back a laugh “I will make sure you sleep better, Ingo! Reduce the tiredness!”

“Good luck with that,” Nobori mused, then looking up at the god once again. “Now… Arceus”

“You are ready?”

Nobori offered his hand to Akari, who took it firmly “We are” She answered for the both of them, her tone as sure as she could manage.

“Please remain still. I will recommend you all shut your eyes”

Akari took a deep breath “I’m trustin’ you”

“It is not misplaced, I assure you. Please, close your eyes”

And - though still worried about yet another mistake from the god - Akari did, in fact, close her eyes, and cling to Nobori’s hand for dear life.

She could sense Lady Sneasler just behind them. And, in what felt like a flash, she was weightless.

When she once again landed on her feet, her hand was empty

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Oh shit the inevitable reunion chapter

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Emmet celebrated his 35th birthday alone, it was the happiest birthday he'd had since Ingo had disappeared 3 years prior.

Because he knew that it was this year - *this* year, that Ingo would be returning from his harrowing adventure. And Emmet needed to be prepared for whatever way his brother would be coming back to the correct time.

He'd saved a slice of the cake from the employee party. He even saved a party hat, should his brother want one (he never did, but he'd always offered). He'd done a full tidying of his brother's room. He'd gotten the plans to reopen the singles line in order despite all of the pitying looks he'd been getting from his own staff. He'd gotten his loyalty program with Fearow Flights renewed just in case he needed to fly to Sinnoh.

He also spent perhaps a bit too much of his extra time prodding his cousin, Iris, for things that teenagers liked, trying to make sure he had something prepared for Akari when he met her again. Their guest room was a little personalized, with her piplup hat that he had carefully taken care of laying on the pillow with blues and yellows around the room itself - just in case the both of them ended up in Unova - he couldn't be too careful!

He recalled seeing a familiar set of gray eyes and blue-black hair on the news. She'd gone missing just after he turned 34. Over a year ago, she'd been taken to the past. He had taken a screenshot of the story on his computer, including her mother's name. Johanna Fletcher

He'd contemplated reaching out to the woman, trying to explain the connection he had to her daughter so that she knew that she wasn't

alone… but realized that would be unwise. There was no way she'd believe him. So instead, he pinned the photo with the details of the girl up on his fridge, using a zoroark magnet.

Elesa - despite having the photographic proof on her phone of her brother's escapades from all those years ago - sometimes wondered if they were doing something pointless. She'd admitted that she was starting to think that this was all just a wait for nothing.

"Your lack of faith is unsurprising, yet disheartening!" Emmet pointed out, Elesa wincing at the hurt look in his eyes

".. I know, Em. But… I don't know. It's been three years. And… He's still not here" She reasoned, though that didn't change Emmet's confused expression

"I know! But I am now 35, and Ingo was 35 when he was sent back to us! He will be here within the next year. We must be prepared!" Emmet reasoned, and Elesa knew she couldn't dissuade him, and didn't bother.

And so, the year went on.

The only real stumbling block for Emmet as he patiently waited for his brother's return had been an official government letter from the Unovan census and registration branch telling him that the state was going to declare Ingo dead, and he sent back a verr-ry strongly worded letter stating that if they did that, he'd hire a verrrrrrry good lawyer to sue the state for emotional distress. They graciously extended the deadline by two more years - which was unnecessary, but appreciated.

That had been at the three-month mark - now he was 5 months in, when Emmet was woken up in the middle of the night by a distressing noise coming from his living room and the smell of Ozone permeating the whole space.

He'd never moved so fast in his life, practically leaping out of bed and

pulling himself around the corner as he looked into his living room from the hallway

“Ingo?? *Ingo!* !”

The whole living room was a mess! The blankets were on the floor, some of the frames on the wall had fallen and the knick-knacks on the shelves were on the floor, but the coffee table broken by -

“Ah! Lady Sneasler!!!”

“Snaw!!!”

The Noble seemed quite pleased to see him again, but looked over at the messed-up couch, where a familiar figure was trying to sit up, but seemed a bit too disoriented to realize that he was sideways.

Emmet felt his heart jump into his throat, rushing over and pulling the man upright, getting a good look at his face as he grabbed it “Ingo!?! Ingo, Ingo-”

Ingo seemed to come to rather quickly after being righted and seated properly on the couch, and his eyes snapped to Emmet’s - wide and silver and tired and *here* , he was *here* . They were both *here*

“Ingo…”

“... Emmet….” Ingo’s eyes flitted over his brothers face, staring at him with surprise and relief in equal measure, before saying - rather lamely “...You look older”

Emmet stuttered out a wet laugh “Well so do you!” He pointed out, before taking a shaking breath “I knew you’d come home. I am Emmet and I knew I just needed to be patient Thank Arceus - Thank whoever, whatever-”

Ingo pulled his brother into his arms, the hug tight and almost crushing “... You are *my* Emmet. The Emmet that I know… My twin.. You are him”

“Yes…. I am also the Emmet you were just with, but yes, I am also your Emmet. You are my Ingo. You are *home* and I am so glad” Emmet managed to say without crying, and hugged him back tightly.

The two didn't say much of anything for a moment, before Emmet realized they were missing something… or, more accurately, some *one* .

"... Where is Akari?" Emmet pulled away, looking around as if he'd missed her.

Ingo paused at the question, as if just realizing something. He then looked at his left hand, which was empty, and stared at it, coming to a realization.

"... She went home. To her mother" He stated, with a certain knowledge to his tone as he looked back at Emmet.

"Oh… yes… I suppose that makes sense" Emmet reasoned, looking almost disappointed at the lack of teenager "... Well, good thing I still have our frequent flyer account renewed for later!!"

Ingo gave a questioning expression "What?"

"Snee?"

"Oh, right! Yes!" Emmet suddenly stood up "We must - oh there is much to do! Yes!"

Ingo tried to get up, taking a second of discombobulation as Emmet walked away on swift, feet, clearly formulating an idea in his head with his trademark impulsivity.

"Emmet?" Ingo questioned his hectic actions as he stood up straight.

"We need to call Elesa, and Skyla! Yes, Skyla can get us to Sinnoh, no problem! Uncle Dreyden will have to wait because he won't want us to go to Sinnoh, but I know that we must! If you are home now-"

"Emmet!" *"SNAW!"*

The younger twin stopped in his tracks, eyes wide "... Yes?"

"... Sit, please" Ingo requested, motioning back to the couch.

"What?"

"Sit, Emmet. You look… you need to take a breath"

"Wh- I don't need to *breathe* -"

"Agree to disagree. Sit"

Emmet scowled, though the pause in his movement finally made him look tired. "Ingo. I have been waiting for three years. You are here. My niece is not. I am Emmet and I want to see both of you despite how happy your return has made me"

"Emmet… please, sit with me. For just a minute. I was not done with hugging you, you know."

Deflated at the request, Emmet couldn't find it in him to say no to Ingo, and sat next to him, as Ingo did the same, wrapping an arm around his beloved brother's shoulders. The two sat there in one another's company for a few minutes, Lady Sneasler taking a seat on the floor, before Ingo spoke again.

"I have been gone from you for three years, Emmet." Ingo quietly stated "I have missed you. Give me time to enjoy being home, please… I know that Akari is safe. She is with her mother. She is probably also experiencing the happiness that I am. Even if I cannot avoid my worries. I want to be happy now, please"

And Emmet knew he was right. Akari was not going anywhere. They can take some time to celebrate, to be gracious and relieved and happy.

Ingo, meanwhile, shut his eyes, and spoke no further.

Was he disappointed when Akari was not holding his hand when he returned? Yes. But… it made sense that they were sent to their respective homes.

He was happy to see his brother, and for now, that was enough

Her daughter had been missing for 15 months. 15. Over a year, less than a year and a half. Sometimes it felt like so much longer.

What was Johanna even to do? The search had long been called off, and while the Sinnoh limit for someone being listed as missing was 5 years, that felt like so long from now.

So, she just kept waiting.

That particular day, around noon, she'd been having tea by herself in the living room downstairs, her purrloin taking a nap in the light coming from her window. She was about to get back up to toss the tepid leaf water before a startling noise came from upstairs.

Nearly dropping her cup, Johanna ran up the stairs, and yelled out "What was that??" She stood at the start of the upstairs hallway, eyes wide "Who's there??"

There were fumbling noises coming from her daughter's room. The room that had been unused in over a year. The room she hadn't been able to go into since her daughter had been declared missing.

Johanna pushed the door open cautiously, a figure standing in the middle of the room, looking around as if they were lost.

Though the lights weren't on inside, the light from the hall, as well as the windows in the bedroom lit the room up well enough. But the silhouette was nearly unmistakable. She was staring down at her hand after looking around, before noticing the door open and staring over at Johanna.

“…. Mom?” A familiar voice called out to her, looking almost shocked at who she was looking at.

Despite her doubt, despite her shock and disbelief, she managed to reply with “... Akari?”

The girl's eyes were already filling with tears, and Johanna didn’t even care that her daughter was wearing bright yellow overalls ten years out of date, with scars on her face and hair longer than she’d ever had before she’d disappeared.

She was practically tackled by the teenager, who had sobbed out a desperate “ *Mo-mmy-y!* !” with a breaking voice, and Johanna couldn’t be bothered to think about anything else for even a second. She wrapped her arms around her daughter, and squeezed with all of the shocked relief that she could muster once she realized who she was holding was real.

Her daughter was home, Akari was *home.* All other questions and confusions and bafflement could wait.

… Well she wouldn’t wait very *long* to get her questions answered, but still. Not now.

“Akari? Sweetheart - *Akari, where were* - “

“One second Mom… just… one second” Akari muttered against her mother’s shoulder, her tone still heavy and voice still a little hoarse, making her mother pause.

“Oh, yes… of course, sweetheart.” Johanna stopped herself “I just… I’m so *relieved* ”

“Me too mom just… it's been… a lot… I need…I just need some time, I -”

“Loi? ”

The family purrloin poked its head into the room, curious as to the noise, and looked surprised at Akari's arrival, eyes wide and mouth open

"Wuh…" Akari sniffled, recalling the pokemon's name as she stared back "H.. Hattie?"

The cat pokemon looked thrilled to see the girl, jumping up and pouncing forward to rub against the girl's leg with a delighted purr.

That made Akari pull away from her mother with a small, delighted chuckle at the affectionate action "hehe… Hi, Hattie. Its good to see you too"

"She missed you as much as I did, it seems" Johanna playfully pointed out

"Heh… nice." Akari reached with a hand, giving the cat pokemon some comfortable head rubs.

There was a moment of quiet - with Hattie's purring filling the space, before Johanna spoke again.

"Akari… Baby…" She reached, putting a hand on her daughter's cheek to get her full attention. "Where *were* you?"

"…. You're not gonna believe me, mom" The girl stated rather flatly.

"Oh honey, you *appearified* in your bedroom wearing clothing that looks like you picked it off the rack at a Y2K specialty store. I'll believe anything you have to say about wherever the hell you've been"

"Wh.. Y2K….?" Akari looked down at her short-sleeved bright pink shirt and yellow overalls, as well as the light up sneakers which had been dimly flashing anytime her feet moved.

"Urgh… *Arceus* !!"

Johanna had needed a few moments to take in the story once Akari was finally done. It had taken Akari a long, long time to recite everything, from waking up in the past to all of her tribulations to the adventure ten years in the past to her finally coming home. It had been a lot to take in, truly.

"…. Well, none of that is false, is it?"

Akari shook her head

Johanna exhaled, thinking more "… This Ingo - the man who helped you, he was…is… the subway boss in Unova?"

She nodded "He took care of me when the trip back went wrong, like I said. He's always been good. He helped me a lot"

"Hm… and.. He should be back in Unova, you said?"

Akari nodded, looking a bit disappointed at that fact.

"Hm…. Well, I suppose that settles it then" Johanna announced with no context, making her daughter look up at her in confusion.

"Hm?"

"… Once we've settled everything here in Sinnoh, and you're adjusted, we're off to find this man, Ingo" her mother stated with crossed arms and a firm nod "I need to thank this man in person for taking care of you"

"I…." Akari huffed, realizing she needed to tell her mom about one important detail she'd purposefully left out, she cleared her throat "Mom?"

"Hm?"

"There's… one more thing, I need to tell you about" Akari admitted, face red with a little embarrassment.

"Hm?"

"It's uh… I didn't tell you how we got to travel without anyone getting suspicious"

Johanna perked up “Oh, I was going to ask how you got on a boat!”

Akari chuckled awkwardly, before clearing her throat and continuing “Well uh, he went by a different name for a while. He said he was Nobori Sho so that they didn’t know who he was, and with that name it sounded like he was going home, it helped. We weren’t questioned”

“Ah, that does sound pretty Sinnohan… Did you change yours as well?”

“Uh, yeah.. I was… I was Akari Sho… He pretended to be my dad for a while” She admitted, watching her mom’s face.

Oh, *that* caught her mother’s attention “... Your dad? He pretended to be your *father* ?”

Akari nodded, nearly looking embarrassed - though honestly, she mostly just looked sad. Her mother came to a rather abrupt conclusion as she took in this new information

“Hm… Then I *definitely* need to meet and thank this man” Johanna confirmed with a shake of her head “You were a nightmare at five years old. To pretend to be your father even halfway convincingly, he must have the patience of a saint”

“Wh- *Mom!!!* ”

Crying. There was a lot of crying going on. So much crying. Dear Arceus.

Barry cried, Lucas cried, shit, even Professor Rowan was misty eyed - which was odd, because he looked like Kamado and Kamado didn’t cry, but she wasn’t about to think about that for too long.

“Phew!” Johanna huffed as she shut the front door of the house “Rowan really just *kept on asking questions,* huh?”

“Yyyup” Akari admitted, sighing deeply as she sunk deeper into the couch somehow.

“Hm… well, how about I look at flights to Unova, hm?”

“Wha, already?”

“Yes, already. I need to meet this mysterious Ingo!” her mother argued, and Akari couldn’t hold back a chuckle as she rolled onto her back. She was absolutely going to be falling asleep right there before her mother even got a chance to-

Knock knock knock

“What…” Akari’s mother looked at the door “ I swear, if it's another reporter, I am letting Hattie scratch their face” Johanna grumbled as she approached the door.

“Please do” Akari kept her eyes on the ceiling.

Akari heard the door open, and for a solid 6 seconds, there was no sound, causing Akari a mild sort of concern. Someone cleared their throat, and spoke.

“Pardon me, is this the Fletcher household?”

Akari sat up so quickly her head swam at the voice.

“Oh, Oh!” Johanna seemed to connect who was at her door with the image she’d seen through searching on the internet, though they were currently out of Akari’s field of view “You! You’re Ingo Wagner, aren’t you!?”

“I…” he seemed caught off guard “yes, I am.”

“And you’re - You’re Emmet, correct?” her mother’s tone reminded her of the face Hattie made when she caught flying types.

“Verrrry correct of you! You are Miss Fletcher, yes?”

Akari practically shoved herself off of the couch and onto her feet to be in view of the door, staring in surprise at the guests.

Ingo and Emmet were there, older than when she last saw them, but Ingo looked far more like what she was used to. 10 years was a long time, and being in your mid-thirties was very different from being in your mid twenties - at least, she could see that now. They were dressed in opposing colors, black and white, and Emmet had grown out his hair - (*What??)* - and it was in a low ponytail. But Akari was a bit too focused on Ingo (*Sorry Emmet)* .

Johanna could see that the two had locked eyes, and moved out of the way, pulling the door open fully.

Ingo looked relieved to see her again more than nearly any other emotion, as if he'd been worrying about her endlessly, and maybe he had been. Just like she had been.

He gave her a slow nod as a greeting "Hello, Akari"

Instead of getting a greeting back from her, he got eyes watering up full of tears, which immediately startled Ingo.

"Wh- Akari?"

She stuttered for a few seconds, before Johanna grabbed Emmet by the sleeve to pull him out of the way, and Akari barreled forward, tackling Ingo so hard he had to take several steps back to stay upright.

"Duh-Dah-addy!" She ended up starting to cry right into his shoulder, grabbing at him tightly and clinging like an aipom.

Oh, oh he hadn't been called such a thing in *weeks* , and he couldn't be bothered to respond with words, gathering up his daughter in a tight, encompassing hug full of relief.

There was the sudden sound of a phone camera shutter after a solid ten seconds of silence, startling Akari out of her emotion as she turned her head to the right, where a couple of strangers were standing.

Ingo huffed “Elesa, that was *highly* inappropriate”

The black-haired woman pouted as she lowered her phone “But it was so cute! I wasn’t expecting it!”

“Elesa, put your phone down, please” The older man behind her huffed, arms crossed “We haven’t even been introduced properly. This is not a ‘good look’, as you say.”

“Oh, ah, yes, yup, Whoops!” Elesa sheepishly chuckled “I just - it was adorable! I wanted to get a picture!”

Akari wiped at her face rather quickly, letting go of Ingo “It-it’s okay.. Uh.. who are you guys…?”

“Oh, I’m your rich aunt, technically!” Elesa grinned “Tia Elesa, please! Given permission from your mother, I can’t wait to spoil you!”

Johanna stared at her with wide eyes “Are you - the Gym Leader? Elesa Delgado? The Supermodel??”

“That I am!” Elesa posed proudly

The mother’s eyes fell on the older man “... And you? I’m afraid I don’t recognize you”

“Well, given the logic of this group it seems I am a grandfather, or great uncle, depending on which title is being offered”

Akari stared at him for a moment “... You’re Gym Leader Drayden, right?”

“That I am.” He confirmed “It is a pleasure to meet you.” he gave her a light, respective bow “I will admit, I was only just told about this situation, but I am eager to get to know the both of you”

“Ah, well, wow.” Johanna was starting to look a little overwhelmed at the whole group at her front door, and motioned to the inside of her home “Uh, how about we all go-”

“I hate to interrupt!” Emmet called out, raising one of his hands to cut

her off “but I would also like my hug! I am ten years removed from my last niece hug!!”

Akari turned her head to look at him, seeing a smile on his face that looked just like how he’d smiled the last time she’d seen him. It was just hitting her that the last time she’d seen him was a few weeks ago, but the last time he’d seen *her* was *ten years ago.*

Ingo’s hand left her shoulder as she turned to face Emmet fully. He looked a little older, a little more mature, but there was that slight mischievous look in his eyes, as always.

“Hello, my dear niece!”

Akari gave him a smile, before practically marching over and grabbing the man in a hug that he quickly reciprocated, and after a few seconds she muttered into his white coat. “Hi, Uncle Emmet”

He gave her a sure squeeze and parted the hug, hands on her shoulders as he took a good look at her, his eyes getting a bit glassy as he took her in “Look at you! You’re so big now!!”

Akari couldn’t hold back a little laugh at that, and gave him a shrug in response “Well, yeah. I’m not five anymore”

“And yet!” Emmet started, though he didn't finish, giving her rather silly smile

“....And yet?”

“You’re still adorable!” he teased, grabbing her face “And you have that same smile from when you were little - what a delight!”

Akari turned red with another laugh, shoving away his hands before giving him another hug - still laughing at the comment, but clearly happy to hear that.

Emmet gave her another squeezing hug in return, looking up to Ingo “Make it a group hug, come on!” He then turned his head to Johanna “You too, Miss Fletcher! Might as well!”

Akari’s mother laughed a bit at the request, but approached regardless “Might as well!” She shook her head good naturedly “Seems my daughter's family has grown several magnitudes in just a few

moments!”

Ingo approached Emmet and Akari “She could have only done that because of how you raised her, Miss Fletcher.” Ingo stated “I mean to express how grateful I am that you raised such a remarkable girl” Akari could feel her face turn bright red like a chimchar’s flame at the comment, her mother looking quite delighted and flattered.

“I agree! Quite the exceptional girl!” Emmet added “And an excellent battler on top of it!”

“Battler?”

Oh, *that* caught Dreyden’s attention, as Akari ended up enveloped in a hug on all sides.

“Yes, battle! Now, come say hi to your great-niece!” Emmet motioned him over with a tilt of his head.

“Ah, so I *am* great uncle?”

“Unless you *want* to be a grandpa” Ingo rose a brow

“Oh, sweet Reshiram, I swear on your honor-”

“Don’t be dramatic and get in on the hug, old man!” Elesa announced as she ended up squeezing both Johanna and Akari “It's so nice to finally meet the both of you, by the way! Again - hope you don’t mind your girl getting spoiled!”

“Hah! I think she’s earned it” Johanna responded with a light tone.

“You bet she has!” Emmet announced “Come, uncle! Big hugs! You are very good at those!”

Drayden sighed, though there was something in his eyes that told Akari he was smiling under his facial hair. “If I must”

“You absolutely must!” Ingo called out “Please do, before I am overwhelmed by the hug’s duration”

Akari was also a little overwhelmed as Dreyden joined in - the man so big he could encase most of them, and she could feel the squeeze.

Once they'd all let go, Johanna cleared her through to get their attention "Now, how about you all come inside?? Yes? I'm sure you're all tired from getting to Twinleaf. I'll put on a pot of coffee - please! "

"Oh, yes! Thank you! I am sure we all have much to discuss!" Emmet agreed

"Yes, let us go inside." Ingo nodded in agreement with Emmet's words. However, he stayed back for a moment as everyone went inside of the home, with Akari about to head inside, but spotting Ingo not moving, and turning around to face him.

"... Uh.." the girl thought for a second, and turned red, realizing just then that she'd tackled him, and what she'd called him as she did so "Uh.. Before I forget, I just wanna way sorry for yelling …that… at you.."

"There is no apology needed" Ingo reassured, reaching over and hooking an arm around her shoulder

"... You sure? I won't call you that again. I'm still sorry."

Ingo huffed "Akari…"

"Yes?"

Ingo took a breath. He'd been reciting this to himself since they got on the plane to Sinnoh. He could do it. He could say it.

"If you wish to, please, continue to call me 'dad" he stated "Any man with half of a brain would be bursting with pride to have you as a daughter. It would be an honor to have that term used on me, should you continue to wish to"

Those wide, surprised eyes looking up at him brought him right back to when she was smaller - when he'd realized just how different "Uncle" was from "Dad", and how little he minded the change. He saw it as an upgrade, really.

"... Are you sure? The other guy I called dad didn't think so" She looked away, and he squeezed her shoulder to get her attention again.

"... He was a dumbass, to put it politely." Ingo replied "if I wish to be

harsher - and I do - I would call him a *fucking idiot* ”

The cursing coming from him felt so out of left field that Akari couldn’t stop a sudden reaction, pushing the man away from her with a full-body laugh out loud.

“Bah-hah-Dah-ahd!” She wheezed “You can’t curse like that!! You’ll give my mom a heart attack!”

“I’m sure there are worse things” Ingo playfully replied “Like how I’m sure Emmet is going to start flirting with your mother any minute”

“... What?”

“You might want to stop it. He’s very charming”

“But- wh- “ Akari ended up rushing for the door “Uncle Emmet!!! *Don’t flirt with my mom!* !”

Ingo heard Emmet let out a slightly baffled *“What??”* And the eldest twin shook his head with a small laugh, following behind him, and shutting the door right behind him.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter :))))

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Some questions are answered, and an Epilogue finishes us off

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Well? Does she accept the terms?”

Ilene seemed rather excited as asked the question. She watched Ingo look at Lady Sneasler with his own questioning expression, the noble in question seemed to be in deep thought.

Aiden was across the way of the clearing they’d set up a hypothetical shop in for the afternoon, over by some climbable rocks with Akari. He was keeping her occupied by letting her show him how to climb up the rather shallow wall ‘Sneasler style’. While Ilene and Ingo conversed with Lady Sneasler about the important next step of her adjustment to the modern day.

The agreement they’d managed to strike seemed like a best-case scenario for Lady Sneasler - but they of course had to run it by the Noble.

The idea was this: Spend most of her time in Unova as the newest battle Subway Mascot (The subway depot agents loved her already (mostly. Isadore was a tough sell)), and live in the protected area of the “highlands” (now protected land) during the annual brooding season. Ingo wouldn’t be able to stay for the whole brooding season with the noble, but Akari was up to the challenge - Ingo coming for the last few weeks before they would both return to Unova together.

It was a lot simpler than it seemed once it was laid out, and Ingo could only hope that Lady Sneasler would be alright with the annual travel in a pokeball. From Professor Juniper to Professor Rowan, from Rowan to Akari, and then from Akari to the highlands.

Lady Sneasler looked up from her thoughts, and gave an affirmative nod “ *Snee!* ”

Ingo’s eyes lit up at her affirmative vocalization “Excellent, my lady! We shall start with that once this current brooding period is over!”

“Wonderful!” Ilene clapped excitedly, jumping just a bit “I’m happy that Aiden and mine’s idea was pleasing to her! I was a little worried, admittedly, but we took a good while to come up with it”

“Well, to be fair, you had ten years to come up with something,” Ingo commented, giving a rather light shrug.

Ilene chuckled “That we did! Happy we had all that time too! Got paperwork set up and everything!”

“And might I say,” Ingo stood up from the rock he’d been sitting on “You have not aged a day since then, Irida”

“Oh, well thank you-” she paused after she realized what name he’d called her, shutting her mouth with wide eyes.

Ingo said nothing, but his smug smile said it all, and the woman sighed deeply at how easily she was found out.

“Sneaky, Warden. Sneaky” She scolded, though there was no bite to it.

“Oh, **I’m* * Sneaky, Miss Irida?” He teased right back

The former clan leader chuckled as she shook her head, letting out a quick sigh before asking “What gave it away?”

“You look like yourself but with long hair. You didn’t even try to change your voice… It was quite obvious, but I assumed you would reveal yourself” Ingo responded “However, I will admit I grew impatient.”

Irida couldn’t hold back a laugh at that, a tone of relief there, mixed with a bit of exasperation.

“Does Akari know?” Irida questioned

“ *ADAMAN!!* ”

“Gah! Ft! *What??* ?”

Irida and Ingo watched with a certain amount of amusement as Adaman nearly fell off of the small cliff he was attempting to climb at the calling out of his name.

“You did that on purpose!”

“And *you* thought a haircut would hide your identity from us!!” Akari called back from the top of the small cliff “Liar! Adaman’s a little liar!”

“When did you even find out?!” Adaman managed to get his footing again, climbing up in earnest - though that earnestness didn’t make him any faster, funnily enough.

“I noticed when you didn’t answer me about the Diamond Clan when I was little, you butt! Thought you were being slick!” Akari playfully taunted “Still not good at climbing, though! Nice to see *that* didn’t change!”

“ *You little-!!* ”

Ingo shook his head at the familial teasing going on, with Adaman getting closer to Akari with every second… slowly. Ingo turned his attention to Irida, expression changing to subtly pensive “... Might I ask what has happened to the both of you? Hisui died many years ago…”

“A blessing, or a curse - depending on who you ask” Irida responded rather vaguely “I can tell you another time but.. Not now. Things are still settling. It is a long story, but I am willing to tell you… but later”

While Ingo desperately wanted an answer, he took her advice backed off, knowing that she was correct.

In the last week they’d spent in Sinnoh, *a lot* of work had been done - Mostly in getting everyone up to speed, and figuring out what to do next.

The “What to do next” being the most pertinent.

First and most important matter was the one concerning Lady Sneasler.

They'd managed to convince her into a pokeball for the trip, but Ingo knew that wouldn't be her permanent home. She needed space - she needed her *home* . And Their long-time friends had helped make that happen (And ensured that he got some time back in Sinnoh to spend with Akari, Johanna, and the rest of them for a good chunk of the late summer and early fall - Three weeks was a long time).

When they'd managed to find "Ilene and Aiden" still working as rangers, and still looking the same, that had just solidified Ingo's suspicions, as well as Akari's. But now that it was confirmed, he could certainly wait for an answer from Irida and Adaman. He was sure that Akari wouldn't mind waiting either.

Ingo felt his phone go off, and he held it in hand, looking at the received message

[Has LS given her blessing on the plan?]

He quickly texted Emmet back **[Affirmative. We are now waiting for Adaman and Akari to be done challenging each other to some bizarre game I don't know the rules of]**

Ingo looked back up at them - both at the top of the small cliff and seeming to now be wrestling each other for something.

Irida huffed "Honestly, you'd think a hundred and fifty years would mellow him out, or perhaps mature him! But no! He's still ready to put her in a chokehold!!"

"She's also ready to do that" Ingo reminded

"That doesn't make it better!" She huffed, making a decided march forward "You two! For the love of Arceus-"

"Arceus can kiss my ass!" Akari yelled right back, her scowl clearly obvious even with her distance from Irida "He returned me to my mom looking like I belonged on the wiggles! I'll never forgive him! My mom still teases me about it!!"

“Hey, the wiggles are great!” Adaman argued “They have that cute song about the Octillery Garden!”

“That’s the Heracross’, you buffoon!”

“Oh, as if *I* keep up with modern music!”

“ *Modern-!!* ”

“A-and they’re at it again” Ingo huffed, though there was clear amusement in his tone “Perhaps they just need to let out all their energy. Like toddlers”

“Like toddlers indeed” Irida rolled her eyes “But… you will be here for another week, yes?”

“Yes” Ingo confirmed “And I will return after a few more weeks to help Lady Sneasler. I do not start my work as a conductor for another few months… I have to retake my certifications, it shall take a while before I can get back to my first job”

“Ah.. How is that going for you?”

The conversation spurred on by that question was light and pleasant as they waited for the other two to finish whatever the hell it was they were doing.

Adaman and Akari ended up in a rather hilarious stalemate, and were called back down by Lady Sneasler, who waved them down - happy to give the now much bigger Akari an affectionate lick.

“Hehe, thank you, Lady Sneasler”

“Snaw!”

“Are you two finally done play fighting like sneaselets?” Ingo questioned playfully

“Pfft, did you just call Sneasel Kits “sneaselets”??” Irida questioned, laughing as she did so - clearly not expecting the term

“I say that when I am deliberately condescending” Ingo responded with some amusement to his tone - clearly still joking

“Condescending? Hah! You’re incapable. That requires conveying sarcasm for than once a year” Adaman teased “As if you’re capable of that”

“Oh, no, I am completely incapable of sarcasm. I am always sincere. At all times. Of course” Ingo responded, hand over his heart

“Dad can’t *not* be sincere. He’s the sincerest!” Akari argued

“Is that a word?” Irida questioned

“Uncle Emmet used it in scrabble two nights ago - it’s a word!” Akari grinned “We had to look it up, but it was there in the dictionary!”

“Emmet likes to think that words exist and decides to use them in scrabble, and then we find out that the word does, in fact, exist. It’s his favorite way to gamble” Ingo reasoned “Now that we have things settled and confirmed, let us head back down the pathway and to Oreburgh City. Uncle Drayden would like for us to all have dinner tonight”

“All of us?” Irida questioned.

“If you wish to” Ingo nodded “Both of you are invited to join us all for dinner.”

Adaman seemed surprised at the offer “Really?”

“Of course” Ingo responded with a nod “I would like to formally introduce the both of you to Emmet, Elesa, and my uncle, if you are okay with it”

The two shared a look, before Irida looked back to him with a smile that showed a certain level of gratitude he wasn’t used to seeing on her face.

“We would love to. Just let us call the station so we can leave” Irida answered him, patting her jacket pocket

Ingo gave them a nod, as they took out their own phones, muttering between the two of them as they checked the logistics of leaving their shift.

Akari approached Ingo, leaning against his arm and letting out a yawn “So- Lady Sneasler is good with the idea?”

“Snaw!”

“That means yes” Ingo responded, wrapping an arm around her shoulder’s “Hungry after fighting with Adaman?”

“He deserved it!”

“That doesn’t answer my question”

Akari giggled a bit, rolling her eyes “Yeah, Yeah. I’m hungry now. We’re gonna head back as soon as they’re done?”

“Yup.”

“And Lady Sneasler’ll stay here for tonight?”

“Yes. With protection from the rangers”

“Good”

“We’re all set!!” Adaman shouted, waving his phone in the air “Oreburgh, right?”

“Yes. We are eating at a Paldean place” Ingo answered

“Oooh is it ‘Ovoas’?” Irida jumped “That place has some really good cornbread”

“It’s corn *meal* ” Adaman corrected “Not cornbread. That’s a Unovan thing, isn’t it?”

“Cornbread is everywhere there is corn” Ingo responded

“He’s right!” Akari nodded “Everywhere! But yeah, it's called “Mil-ho”!”

“That is not how that’s pronounced” Ingo commented “However, the western Paldean language is quite tricky for the Sinnohan accent”

“You can say that again” Irida rolled her eyes “You’re good at it though!”

“Elesa is Paldean, she moved to Unova when he was little, and speaks western Paldean fluently” Ingo explained “Emmet and I learned through sheer exposure, frankly”

“Oooh, let's go! I wanna ask her about it!” Akari started walking faster towards the downward slope of the trail, before turning back and waving “Come on!!”

“Are you challenging me??” Adaman called out playfully

“You were always the slower clan leader!” Akari teased right back

“Why you little-!!”

Ingo and Irida watched with some amusement as Adaman started running down the trail to catch up to her.

“He’s become more competitive, somehow” Ingo pointed out with clear amusement.

“No, he really hasn’t. I think he’s just excited to see her again” Irida thought “He hasn’t had a proper sparring partner in a while - I just can’t keep up with him in that way, so i’ve been no help” She admitted

“Sparring? Do you mean verbally?”

“Duh! I can kick his ass in a wrestle any day of the week! But verbally? He’s been a headache instigator for years now” She explained

Ingo chuckled, walking just a touch slower so that the shorter woman could keep up with him. “.... I am quite happy to see you, regardless, Lady Irida”

Irida paused for a second, before giving Ingo a smile that betrayed her age with her eyes. “I’m happy to see you too, Warden Ingo”

“Dad!! Irida!! Come on!!” Akari yelled from quite a ways ahead of the two.

“We’re coming, Akari! Slow down, both of you!” He called back.

Irida chuckled “So… ‘Dad’?” Irida finally asked

“... Well, when she was little I was “daddy”, but now I am “Dad” He answered rather playfully

“An appropriate evolution” Irida nodded with a surprising amount of

enthusiasm, though her smile looked a little smug “So…?”

Ingo couldn’t prevent a roll of the eyes “You were correct, yes. Happy now?”

“Hah! I knew it.” She grinned.

“Lady Irida, you were not the only one. Do not take full credit”

“But I’m the only one who can say ‘I told you so’ to your face. I have to make it count” Irida reminded “But… I am happy that you are home, Ingo. You look very correct here. In the right space.. And time”

“And time?”

“... Dialga and Palkia are equal beings” Irida admitted “... Though Palkia is far better behaved” She muttered

“You are only providing me with more questions to ask you later, Lady Irida” Ingo admitted as they continued down the trail.

“Heh, I know.. I’ll answer as many of them as I- as *we* can” Irida confirmed to him.

“And I cannot thank you enough for that” Ingo responded with a grateful nod.

“Come *on* Dad! You and Irida are too slow!!” Akari called from further down the trail.

“The more you complain, the slower we will walk!” Ingo dared.

“Seconded!” Irida called out in agreement, laughing a bit as she said so.

“You two are so lame!” Adaman called out from next to her “Maybe we should just drive the car without them!”

“You wouldn’t dare!” Irida warned, “I have the key!”

“I know how to hotwire!” Adaman quipped right back

“Wh- when did you learn that?? Can you teach me??” Akari seemed to thrum with excitement at the possibility

Oh. no. that was a bad idea

"... Perhaps we should pick up our pace" Ingo suggested

"Perhaps we should" Irida agreed, walking faster already "Unless you want your daughter to know how to commit crimes"

"She already knows how to commit crimes" Ingo reminded, speeding up along with her "However, I would like for her to not know how to commit *more* crimes"

That raised a certain level of surprise on Irida's face "Then we should get them to that restaurant then!" She laughed, taking the lead. Ingo couldn't stop his own, lopsided smile at her laugh, and followed up right behind

"Yes, let's!"

Chapter End Notes

Whoo! This was a fun one - Hope ya'll liked it!

Feel free to bug me on tumblr over @ Doodleimprovement!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!